UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

# Lost in the Woods

## A Study of the Forest Motif in British Literature

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September 2017

| Tiedekunta/Osasto – Fakultet/Sektion – Faculty<br>Humanistinen tiedekunta | Laitos – Institution – Department<br>Nykykielten laitos | |
|---|---|---|
| Tekijä – Författare – Author<br>Ilkka Rantasalo | | |
| Työn nimi – Arbetets titel – Title<br>Lost in the Woods: A Study of the Forest Motif in British Literature | | |
| Oppiaine – Läroämne – Subject<br>Englantilainen filologia | | |
| Työn laji – Arbetets art – Level<br>Pro Gradu -tutkielma | Aika – Datum – Month and year<br>09/2017 | Sivumäärä– Sidoantal – Number of pages<br>71s + 8s |


Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

Tässä tutkielmassa tarkastellaan metsä-motiivin asemaa, vaihtelua ja siihen kytkeytyvää symboliikkaa brittiläisessä kirjallisuudessa. Analyysin pohjana toimivat konseptit ”erämaa” (wilderness), ”utopia” ja ”hämy” (twilight), joita hyödyntäen tarkasteluun valitut brittiläisessä kirjallisuudessa esiintyvät metsät voidaan kategorisoida, sekä Carl Jungin teoria arkkityypeistä, joihin metsä itsessään kuuluu. Edellä lueteltujen konseptien avulla tutkielmassa tarkastellaan metsä-arkkityypin eri aspekteja brittiläisessä kirjallisuudessa ja pyritään osoittamaan konseptien hyödyllisyys kaunokirjallisten metsien kategorioinnissa. Tutkielmassa esitellään ja eritellään kunkin konseptin erityispiirteitä sekä analysoidaan ja verrataan kuutta kaunokirjallista tekstiä, joissa metsä-motiivia on kuvattu mainittujen konseptien mukaisesti.
Konseptia ”erämaa” havainnollistavat keskiaikainen ritariromaani *Sir Gawain ja vihreä ritari* sekä Kenneth Grahamen *Kaislikossa suhisee*. ”Utopia”- konseptin mukaisia metsiä havainnollistavat keskiaikainen teksti *A Gest Of Robyn Hode* sekä J.M. Barrien *Peter Pan*. Viimeistä konseptia, ”hämyä”, havainnollistavat William Shakespearen *Kesäyön unelma* sekä J.R.R. Tolkienin *Hobitti*.

Tutkielmaa tehdessä havaittiin, että hyödynnetty teoreettinen viitekehys tarjoaa hyvän lähtökohdan erilaisten kaunokirjallisten metsien analysointiin ja kategoriointiin. Monet fiktionaaliset metsät toki sisältävät samanaikaisesti piirteitä useammasta kuin yhdestä konseptista, mutta pääasiallisesti konseptien avulla kaunokirjalliset metsät, ainakin brittiläisessä kirjallisuudessa, on mahdollista jakaa esitettyihin konseptuaalisiin kategorioihin.



Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords
Metsä, motiivi, arkkityypit, symboliikka, brittiläinen kirjallisuus

Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe – Where deposited
Keskustakampuksen kirjasto

Muita tietoja – Övriga uppgifter – Additional information

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# 1 Introduction

In Western mythology and literature, the symbolism surrounding the forest has never been explicit, but rather nuanced and at times paradoxical. Whilst the absolute meaning of the forest remains undefined and varies geographically, culturally and historically, the motif presents itself across literary genres in different eras as "a pattern of primary significance with deep psychic resonance" (Hasan 15) and thus could be considered an archetype in Western literature. The continued popularity of and interest in the forest in literature could be explained, as Robert Harrison observes, by how cultures across the ages have regarded forests as "archaic, as antecedent to the human world," providing an abundant source for narratives and symbols (1). In Western literature, forests are both locations for archetypal situations; adventure, hiding and challenge, but also function as symbols for wilderness, lawlessness and danger (Bakhysh 14). It would seem that in the Western imagination and the unconscious, the forest can be at the same time a place of fear, adventure and enchantment, at times emphasizing one element over the others.

The archaic forest appears as a literary device already in Antiquity. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, written between 29 and 19 BC, the forest represents the original home of man; in his epic, Virgil writes that mankind was born "of trees with tough timber" (Aeneid 8. 306-369). This mythical notion is repeated with the iconic character of Romulus, the founder of Rome, who is raised in a forest by a she-wolf (Aeneid 8. 344-348). Interestingly, a similar motif is found in the *Poetic Edda* and in Norse mythology, where Hoddmímir's forest acts as a refuge for Líf and Lífthrasir during Fimbulwinter, the twilight of the gods. According to Norse mythology, the race of men descends from these two (Lindow 179). As Keith Thomas points out, this idea that the first human beings were *homines silvestres*, sylvan people, also dominated the minds of the Elizabethans, who regarded their ancestors, the ancient Britons as "barbarous and savage" inhabitants of the forests (195). The word for "savage" comes from the Latin words "*silva*" and "*silvaticus*" meaning "wild" and "of the woods". Thus, the archaic forest has become associated with a sense of nostalgia; it represents something that once was: a point of departure for mankind.

In literature, the dichotomy between the wild forest and the civilized city, as in the case of Romulus, supposes that human progress and culture requires a movement from wilderness to civilization. The forest represents wildness, lack of established order and disorientation whilst the city, the symbolical opposite of the woodland, represents culture and law. In order to leave behind his primitive and wild state, man must leave the sylvan abode. This dichotomy has enabled writers and artists to use the forest as a literary and artistic device to create symbolic landscapes for narratives and to exploit the different archetypal notions of the forest. Thus, the literary forest may act as a place of testing one's bravery outside the safety of civilization, a temporary refuge from persecution or authority or as an obstacle in the protagonist's way. Furthermore, the mythical wild forest has for millennia served as a home for various woodland deities, like the horned god Pan, who partake or influence the human experience. The deities and spirits that symbolically reside in the otherworldly forest, far from cities and towns, may aid, hinder or challenge the protagonist. These deities are commonly represented as the guardians or protectors of the forest, conscious and mindful of all its secrets and pathways that in turn may present an obstacle for the uninvited and disorientate the unwanted. This otherworldly forest and its sylvan residents present a challenge for the men and women belonging not to the forest, but to the city and civilization.

In stark contrast with the earlier pagan tradition, the rise of Christianity in medieval Europe cast a new shadow upon the imaginary and literary forest. The forest became increasingly seen as a place of wilderness and associated with ancient pagan devil-worship; a gloomy grove where the old gods still exercised their demonic and sinful manipulation of the human soul (Robert Harrison 61). Simultaneously, however, the complexity and ambiguity surrounding the motif that had existed since the Antiquity "continued to plague medieval writers as an epistemological, if not existential challenge" (Albrecht 18). In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, for example, the forest is not just a physical maze or a place of evil, as it also represents a metaphysical crisis of losing one's orientation in life. Only with the help of a guide named Virgil, an homage and allusion to the *Aeneid*, can the protagonist find his way again (Albrecht 6). Christianity's biggest impact on the literary forest came, however, through the genre of chivalric romance, a medieval literary tradition arguably best exemplified by continental and British Arthurian tales

and mythos, where the wild forest became even more strongly associated with adventure, and a symbolic place for proving one's bravery outside the civilized court. Later, the medieval English folk tales of Robin Hood moved away from the strict Christian ethos, and changed the literary forest into a place of alternative society, a utopia for outcasts. The earliest depictions of Robin Hood draw heavily from British pagan mythos, as observed by Gary Varner, who concludes that Robin, clad in green fairy colors, was often "pictured as the May King" and "essentially a vegetation sacral hero" (135). Furthermore. Varner argues that there are clear connections with Robin and the pagan deity Pan, the Lord of the Wild, as they both "defended unspoiled lands against the encroachment of towns (136). Similarities abound when comparing the legend of Robin Hood to Peter Pan as both figures wear green garments, stand in anarchical opposition to authority and oppression, and reside in their forest abodes. Furthermore, the very name of the roguish protagonist in J.M. Barrie's novel hints to a connection to the older European sylvan tradition and woodland ethos. A clear influence for J.R.R. Tolkien's forest of Mirkwood in *The Hobbit*, however, can be found in Shakespeare's pre-Romantic sylvan pastorals, where literary forests combined elements of Arcadia and the wilderness; they are simultaneously places of supernatural entities, magic and danger.

This thesis will focus on the evolution and variation of the forest motif in British literature. The sylvan landscape has been a popular source of inspiration for British writers, captivating the Celtic, Anglo-Saxon and medieval imagination alike. The British literary forest draws inspiration from both European and local folklore, legends and literary traditions, and based on my readings, the British use of the forest motif can be analyzed through three conceptual categories. I argue that British literary forests and their representations often emphasize different thematic aspects; wilderness, utopia or twilight, and while it is common that these different concepts overlap and appear simultaneously in the forest depictions, there are works of literature that emphasize one aspect over the others. These concepts are used also by Kenneth Grahame, J.M. Barrie and J.R.R. Tolkien writing in the early 20$^{th}$-century to attach certain symbolical and metaphorical value to their respective literary forests. As the depictions of the Wild Wood, the Neverwood and the Mirkwood are arguably influenced by earlier forest portrayals, by analyzing the evolution and variation of these earlier depictions in British literature through these concepts, I am able to

divide the depictions into three conceptual categories and thus present and establish clear connections between the earlier portrayals and the forests depicted by the three novelists. The literature review will be divided into three chapters; the forest as wilderness, the forest as utopia and the forest as twilight, followed by a case study of three texts that illustrate particularly well one aspect of the three concepts. After having established the motif's historical and thematic variation in the British Isles and the conceptual prototypes, I will continue and provide a close study of the forest motifs in J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* (1911), Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937). I argue that the forests depicted in these three children's novels i.e. the Neverwood, the Wild Wood and Mirkwood, are both influenced by earlier tradition and different archetypal ideas of the forest motif, and consciously reworked and rewritten by the authors to fulfill their artistic goals. These connections and revisions will be indicated with examples. I will also discuss the significance of the forest as a literary device in the three narratives, its effect on plot and character development, and the extent to which these three authors have developed and rewritten the motif and its symbolic significance.

# 2 The Forest in British Literature

In the following chapter, I will discuss the significance and variation of the forest motif in the mythology, folklore and literature of the British Isles. In the literature review, I will utilize the conceptual framework, which provides a tool to analyze different variations of the forest archetype, presented below in order to categorize different depictions of the forest motif, and to study how the depictions reflect the trichotomy "wilderness", "utopia" and "twilight". By doing this, I will be able to establish a clear connection between the historical portrayals of the forest and the depictions found in *The Wind in the Willows*, *Peter and Wendy* and *The Hobbit*, and to analyze the extent to which Kenneth Grahame, J.M. Barrie and J.R.R Tolkien have rewritten the forest motif.

## 2.1 Conceptual Framework

As Jane Garry observes, many writers across the ages and across different cultures have drawn inspiration from mythology and folklore, and utilized ancient motifs and archetypes in their contemporary writings (16). Etymologically, an

"archetype" means "initial" or "primary sample" in Greek, and implies the recycling of certain elements. This reusing, however, naturally leads to variation of the primordial archetype or motif (Geybullayeva 13). Even though the Jungian notion of primordial archetypes manifesting themselves in myth and legend has lost some of its popularity, especially regarding the archetypes' supposed biological connection to the human psyche, undoubtedly there are motifs that are recurrent in folklore and literature, and that have for some reason or another maintained their popularity in our imagination (Geybullayeva 16).

Forests abound in literature, and usually they have special symbolic value attached to them, either acting as a place for archetypal situations or functioning as symbols for varying values and ideas. European fairy and folk tales, for example, often make use of the forest motif, and according to Jack Zipes, the woodland space in these tales is often depicted as "unconventional, free, alluring but dangerous" (68). Moreover, the archetype of the forest appears often as a central narrative device in the European folktale; The Brothers Grimm, for example, place the motif at the center of the story in *Hansel and Gretel* and in the *Little Red Riding Hood*, where the protagonists move from civilization into the mysterious woods, become disorientated but eventually return from the forest wiser and having learned a lesson. In the folktales of the British Isles, the forest motif is similarly popular. In *Kate Crackernuts*, the enchanted forest is inhabited by fairies and magic, whereas in *The Three Bears*, the animal residents of the forest are personified, and the woodland, like in many folktales and children's stories, functions as a place of didactic learning. Folktales, fairy tales and children's literature in general "offer new dimensions to the child's imagination which would be impossible for him to discover as truly on his own" (Bettelheim 7). Thus, through literature, children can discover and enter the dark forest that haunts their unconscious without leaving the safety of their home. As the three novels chosen for this thesis are all works of children's literature, it is probable that the authors have been influenced by the European folktale, its use of the forest and its didactic dimensions.

As I argued before, the representations of the forest motif in British literature can be analyzed through the concepts of "wild" and the wilderness, "never" and the utopia and "mirk" and the twilight, as they describe different variations of the

archetype, and in the following paragraphs I will establish the conceptual framework. The concept of "wild" refers to someone or something "living in a state of nature", uncontrolled, or to a location that is inhospitable and desolate. It also refers to primitive and undisciplined individuals and to the absence of culture. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Wind in the Willows*, the forest is a place of extreme weather conditions, hunger and hostile animals, creating a strong contrast between the courtly life of Gawain and pastoral idyll of Mole, and the wilderness. The wilderness represents the archetypal notion of "a place of adventure" since by definition, wilderness is uncontrolled and thus provides an existential challenge for the individual. The forest as wilderness symbolizes therefore the dichotomy between the law and order of civilization, and the barbarity and wildness of raw nature.

"Never", on the other hand, literally means "at no time" or "not under any condition". Consequently, the concept denotes a fantastical place that is beyond our space-time continuum and beyond our rational conception, like the Neverland in *Peter and Wendy*. Similar to the word "utopia" meaning "no-place", "never" also refers to an imaginary "make-believe" place, some place that is unrealizable, where society, to the extent it even exists, may differ drastically from that which is culturally and contextually defined as normal, as evident in the utopian Greenwood of Robin Hood. Furthermore, "never" also refers to a place where the conditions and laws of the surrounding society are turned upside down, and where a new kind of morality and order, often arising from nature, rules.

Tolkien's inspiration for the name of Mirkwood comes from Germanic mythology, where Myrkviðr denoted a "dark or murky wood". The word "mirk", or "murky" denoting "dark", "gloomy" and most importantly "dense mist" derives from the Indo-European root "mer" and the proto-Germanic "merkvia" meaning not darkness, but "twilight", which as Jason Fisher notes in his book, together with the idea of thick mist describes well the dense, mysterious and enchanting forest of Mirkwood (108). Additionally, the gloomy and otherworldly twilight forest can, according to Bruno Bettelheim symbolize the "near-impenetrable world of our unconscious" (94). As the hero enters the murky forest, he enters into an unfamiliar realm and into the unconscious, and if he succeeds in finding his way out, he will,

like Bilbo or the protagonists of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, be wiser and understand his true identity.

### 2.1.1 The Forest as Wilderness

Studying the forest as a literary motif in the British Isles is an extensive task, one which requires a clear and purposeful research plan. The forests depicted in the literary history of Britain represent and reflect many different variations of archetypal symbols and narrative devices, and therefore this literature review will make use of three conceptual categories through which the different forest depictions can be analyzed and classified. The three conceptual categories illustrate and emphasize different aspects and features associated with literary forests, but it is arguably true that the categories are not inflexible, and to some extent overlap with each other in literature.

I will begin with the conceptual category of the forest as wilderness; the challenging wild forest. This association of forests with wild, primitive and threatening nature that function as a counterforce to civilization i.e. cities, villages and towns, and as a challenge to human condition is a common trope in the literature of the British Isles, appearing as a motif across literary traditions. Arguably, it is not difficult to understand why forests to this day evoke feelings of fear and risk; vast and dense forests are dark, disorienting and play with our imagination. They are also places of shadow, of unidentified sounds and of hostile animals. In addition, forests are portrayed as existing beyond the laws of men, where everyone must fight for themselves, often against fierce foes. This feeling of helplessness, uncertainty and impending evil, all of which characterize the wild forest, is present also in *The Wind in the Willows*, where Mole, one of the main protagonists, enters the weasel-infested Wild Wood and becomes subjected to the solitude and terror of raw and unknown nature. Only by reaching the underground hermitage of Badger, a solitary yet well-mannered figure residing in the deep forest, is Mole able to survive the wilderness. In a sense, finding Badger in the Wild Wood was the first step in Mole's quest of self-discovery, and the subterranean abode of Badger, hidden in the dark and dangerous forest, functions as the first stopping point of Mole's adventure. This trope is heavily influenced by the medieval chivalric romance, where the knight often enters a wild forest in order to prove his bravery.

The forest wilderness as a place of evil was a common motif in medieval Britain, and as stated before was greatly influenced by the rise of Christianity. In the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*, written sometime between 700 and 1000 AD, the dark and wild forest functions both as symbolic opposition to the heroic civilization, which is represented by Heorot, the great hall of heroes and kings, and as a lair for various hostile and evil creatures. Though influenced by Christianity, the story of Beowulf is, according to J.R.R Tolkien, himself a known Anglo-Saxon scholar, essentially "a historical poem about the pagan past" (19). Thus, the author of *Beowulf* is combining elements of two religious and cultural traditions, Christianity and paganism, in the narrative. Tolkien's knowledge of Anglo-Saxon literature and culture, his rewriting of the Germanic heroic ideal and his own experiences in the Second World War all influenced his own writing, as seen later in my close study of *The Hobbit*.

In *Beowulf*, the menacing wilderness of the forest manifests itself in many ways; it is "a secret realm −wolf-trodden slopes, wind-swept headlands," and "over it hang trunks glazed in ice, huge-rooted trees lean over the mere" (Beowulf 38). The inhospitable weather conditions, the clandestine location and the satanic creatures that inhabit it are all tropes and devices used by the author to establish a clear symbolism around the motif. The same menacing forest appears later in Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale", written in the late 14$^{th}$-century, where the forest lies barren and is hideous to behold, and neither men nor beasts inhabit it. As Gillian Rudd observes, Chaucer in his depiction "is tapping into humanity's atavistic fear of deep forest", and directly positioning the wild forest in opposition to humanity (61). Importantly, the wild forest that Chaucer is describing is also the location of the temple of Mars, a pagan deity. This repetition of the symbolic connection of paganism and dark forests once again echoes the impact of Christianity on British medieval literature. Additionally, the relationship between forests and paganism is brought up in the Anglo-Saxon *Peterborough Chronicle* (c. 1100), where the mythic Wild Hunt, consisting of dead men, animals and other spirits led by the god Woden, roams the countryside and forests:

> The hunters were black and large, and hideous and their hounds all black and broad-eyed and hideous, and they rode on black horses and on black bucks. This was seen in the park itself in the village of Peterborough and in all the

> woods that stretched from the same village to Stamford, and the monks heard the horns blowing that they blew in the night. (Rositzke 154).

The wild forest in British literature is often inhabited by animals and monsters; *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a late 14th-century poem, and *The Wind in the Willows* all contain scenes where animals residing in forests become hostile towards the protagonists, who have entered the forest in their respective quests. This highlights the tension between the human and the natural world as their encounter may result in violence. In "Cad Goddeau", a medieval Welsh poem preserved in a 14th-century manuscript, the dormant inhabitants of the forest, the trees themselves, are personified and animated, and attack men and destroy their armies. This literary treatment of the forest arguably illustrates the Celtic veneration towards the majestic force that lies dormant in the archaic forests, a trope later adopted by Tolkien in his portrayal of the Ents in *The Lord of the Rings*.

The wild and uncultured forest is also a place for hermits and outcasts, who are either vanquished there by the existing social order or have voluntarily decided to retire away from society. These human residents, as Corinne Saunders observes, leave behind their earlier "code of behaviour to adopt that of wild beasts and savage men" and in a sense integrate into the wilderness (71). The Irish legend of Finn Mac Cunhail, for example begins with the protagonist's escape into the forest, where he learns the ways of the forest and becomes more like it in nature and attributes, before returning back to civilization. On the other hand, in the Anglo-Saxon poem "The Battle of Maldon" the warriors who decide to retreat and escape the battle and flee into a forest are depicted as disloyal and cowardly; the fleeing men abandon honour, society and god and enter the pagan and uncultured forest, where they become nothing but savages. Fleeing from civilization in to the forest can also be a voluntary and ideological act, as is the case with Badger in *The Wind in the Willows*. The hermit has chosen the wilderness and usually has a strong disdain toward society, adapting to the customs and natural laws of the forest. The Badger, in a sense, has integrated into the wilderness.

In British literature, especially from the Middle English period onward, the wild forest is used as a literary device to provide a setting for chivalric narratives and archetypal situations. The wild forest of chivalric romance is a place of adventure,

challenge and disorientation, as seen in Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* (1485) and indeed in *The Wind in the Willows*, where the Mole embarks on typical chivalric quest to the Wild Wood in order to satisfy his curiosity and to learn more about himself and the surrounding world. The forest, symbolizing the wilderness that rules outside the villages, towns and courts, becomes the place where one can prove his bravery and devotion, and engage in the competition between man and nature. In the chivalric tale "The Romance of Peredur", for example, King Arthur's court act as the focal point of the narrative, from whence the protagonist embarks on a series of adventures that take place in forests. In the story, the court functions as a place of merriment and civil society, whereas the forest wilderness is the symbolic place of challenge. During these quests, Peredur, like Mole in the Wild Wood and the protagonist in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, learns valuable lessons about himself and the surrounding world, suggesting that through these adventures in the wilderness, the protagonists acquire important teachings that are otherwise unattainable.

### 2.1.2 The Forest as Utopia

Though the concept of "utopia" was first introduced into literature in the 16th-century by Sir Thomas More, mankind has always been interested in imagining and creating new and better worlds. From Plato's *Republic* to More's *Utopia* (1516), the quest to envision places and new models of society to better organize social life and to maximize human happiness has been unceasing. Furthermore, nature has from the beginning had an important role in these fantasies; Virgil's vision of the utopian Arcadia was influenced by older Greek tradition, where the forest, inhabited by the god Pan was an earthly paradise. Interestingly, whilst Virgil glorified the "middle-state" i.e. the state between the absolute wilderness of forests and the absolute civility of big cities in his pastoral ideal, John Dryden in his English translation of the *Aeneid* transforms the wild wood of Virgil into a "woodland forever green" thus expanding the notion of utopian Arcadia from the pastoral countryside into the sylvan courts (Koelb 85). Consequently, the forest motif in literature appears not just as a place of primitiveness and hostile forces, but also a place of utopian visions and virgin landscapes.

As stated, a utopia symbolizes a better place, and the forest, especially in British literature, has been a popular symbol for rebellion against the corruption and

decadence of civilization and the state. In the forest, man can break away from the chains and restrictions imposed upon him by civilization and society, and find a refuge. Most utopian visions of the forest as a place of freedom borrow the concept of the "wild man" from the wilderness perspective, but instead of viewing this "wild man" as a savage, he is Jean Jacques Rousseau's noble and free man, "the noble savage", who has, as Keith Harrison writes, striped "away the artificial social constructs that corrupt the original innocence of the human soul" (157). The same emphasis on the corrupting forces of civilization and the redeeming qualities of nature is used by William Wordsworth in the poem "Lines Written in Early Spring" (1798) where the speaker of the poem has retired into a grove to ponder the human yearning to reconnect with nature, and the harm that man has inflicted upon man through history; "To her fair works did Nature link / The human soul that through me ran; / And much it grieved my heart to think / What man has made of man" (5-8).

This renaturalization, defined by Harrison as "the great countercurrent of history" running "back towards the sources of simplicity and happiness" manifests itself in British literature through depictions of the forest as a haven or society for the ones who have chosen to resist the dominating powers and the corruption of civilization (157). The literary "never" forest is a place of utopian community and harmony, sometimes portrayed almost as an earthly paradise, and sometimes as a temporary refuge. Literary figures like Robin Hood and Peter Pan reside in utopian forests outside civilization, and like the god Pan, who "lived in Arcadia, where he guarded flocks, herds, and beehives, took part in the revels of the mountain-nymphs, and helped hunters to find their quarry" (Graves 62), they appear to embody the human longing to return to our original state of nature. Moreover, both Robin and Peter are trickster figures, again connecting them with older literary figures and even with mythology.

The "never" forest as a place of utopian harmony, comradery and rebellion against the outside world, as seen in *Peter and Wendy*, is a prominent motif in English folklore, and especially in the legend of Robin Hood. Robin and his band of outlaws use the forest as a hideout, but the forest also symbolizes a society that lives more attuned with the natural world and stands in opposition to the king's society. In many ways it is a utopian world; men live according to natural justice and in

harmony with each other and with nature, outside the unjust institutional laws of the surrounding world. This trope of the forest as a place for anarchy and rebellion is repeated in *Peter and Wendy*, where the protagonist symbolically fights against the adult world and indeed time itself.

As observed in the discussion of the forest as wilderness, the depictions of the utopian forest in British literature are likewise influenced by contemporary religious and societal currents and trends, and therefore utilize different metaphors, symbols and thematic choices in different eras. The impact of Christianity on the literary utopian forest is based on my reading most prominent in the 9th-century Anglo-Saxon text *The Phoenix*, describing the Christian paradise. The forest is a recurring motif in the story, in which the Paradise is decorated with "green forests stretching wide beneath the skies" (Cook 144). The utopian "never" forest is in *The Phoenix* portrayed as luscious, desirable and as the opposite to the dark wilderness in Beowulf, for example. The same trope is utilized by John Milton in *Paradise Lost*, first published in 1667, where Eden is depicted as "a woody theatre / of stateliest view" (4. 131-42). Naturally, the paradises in the two texts reflect imaginary locations, which lie outside our conceptions of time and place and are accessible only for the chosen, much like the Neverland and the Neverwood in *Peter and Wendy*.

This idea of the forest as a counterforce for the political battles, plotting and hierarchy that dominates the civilized world was also a popular theme amongst Elizabethan writers, and especially in the writings of Shakespeare. The Arcadian Forest of Arden in *As You Like It* (1623) is indeed a utopia, a "never" wood, as the forest is depicted as a place of increased equality, love and solidarity. The life of the protagonists in the forest is portrayed much more favorably than the courtly life, and Shakespeare is arguably using the forest as a symbol for mankind's nostalgic Golden Age, where men supposedly led a happier life in harmony with nature. Furthermore, the Forest of Arden symbolizes the archetypal earthly paradise. However, even the utopian society is prone to become affected by human flaw; as seen in the mythos of *Robin Hood* and *Peter and Wendy*, a clear social hierarchy exists in the communities, and in *As You Like It* the characters, though enjoying the freedom of the forest, are unable to totally let go of the patterns of thought and behaviour learnt from the outside world. The forest as utopia is susceptible to human corruption.

The notion of the forest as utopia and its symbolic opposition to civilization and mechanical progress can also be discussed through ecocriticism, which as a field of study has grown in popularity in recent times due to increasing concerns about the sustainability of continuous economic growth and the fear environmental destruction. Ecocriticism examines the interaction between human and non-human in literature, and promotes ecological and environmental awareness (Rudd 4). The risks and threats associated with technological progress and alienation from nature, and an urge to return to the original state of man are acknowledged and pursued by Rousseau, Wordsworth and the Romantics, Thoreau and the Transcendentalists and modern environmentalist movements, all of whom have contributed to the notion of the forest being seen as the archaic and primordial home of man, which provides shelter and refuge for the individuals who do not accept or feel threatened by the infinite belief in progress and its fruits. Of course, the notion of a mythical "golden age" when mankind lived in harmony with nature is a much older literary and philosophical trope, already used by the Greek poet Hesiod in 6th-century BC (Hesiod 77). In Britain, Chaucer in his poem "The Former Age", contrasts the contemporary "cursed, corrupt state of affairs" and the mythical bygone days when men lived in harmony with nature, untroubled by the sufferings and necessities of today, and living off the food provided by nature (Rudd 12). A similar reference to the golden age is found in Shakespeare. The forest utopia then requires that men shed away the burden of civilization and adopt the ways of nature in order to live in harmony with it. Peter Pan, clad in green, taking care of the Lost Boys and rebelling against the adult society wages his war from his utopian hideout. In his utopian forest, Peter can avoid the inevitable curse of time and age. For Peter, the forest provides an escapist utopia where he can forever remain in the childlike state of innocence.

### 2.1.3 The Forest as Twilight

The twilight, or mirk forest evokes feelings of fantasy and gloom; it is a place of nostalgia, myth and secrecy. In my reading, the murky forest represents most fittingly the archetypal pagan woodland of the past; these forests appear almost as living entities, animated either by our own imagination or by archaic and supernatural forces. The twilight forest is a place where "ancestral ghosts − their former worlds − hover in the penumbra of haze, looking back into the eyes of

recollection" (Harrison 186). Furthermore, the twilight forest represents the unconscious; as the hero enters the forest, it is as if he entered his own inner mind, a dream-world where he must deal with his inner darkness and begin to understand who he wants to be.

In British history, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon myths and traditions associate the forest with gods, spirits and the Otherworld, holding their sacred rituals and rites deep in the forest and in sacred groves. The forest came to represent the Other; a place where men and women entered a new realm in search of enlightenment and truth, a place that had an air of its own, and became subjected to supernatural powers and entities. In British folklore, the supernatural element associated with the forest often manifests through various woodland deities, such as Cernunnos, Pan, Herne and the Green Man. In *The Hobbit*, as Bilbo and the dwarves enter Mirkwood, they sense a new presence; they become aware that they have entered a new world, one in which they are only strangers. In essence, the murky forest and its otherworldly guardians prevent the visitors from finding their way through it.

The Celtic veneration of trees, as epitomized in the Welsh poem "Cad Goddeau" where the dormant forces of forests are awakened by magic and used in battle, as well as their idea of the forest as a home for spirits and deities, evolves in the Anglo-Saxon period, as the forest becomes the home of elves and fairies. Alaric Hall observes that elves were usually considered and depicted as entities closely related to humans in appearance, but possessing supernatural qualities and god-like features (11, 47). Hall continues that in Anglo-Saxon place names, gods and elves were associated with forests and woodlands, providing a further explanation as to why the literary faerie kingdoms often lie deep within forests (65). It could be argued that the faeries and elves in many British texts symbolize the nostalgic and idealistic notion of mankind's golden age, when men and women lived in harmony with nature. The elves can also be seen as shepherds of the forest, as is the case in *The Hobbit*, where the elves of Mirkwood guard the woodland realm. Whether the twilight forest is depicted as the home of deities, faeries or elves, it is evident that many British artists have chosen to associate the forest with the Otherworld and with magic.

As James Wade observes, in the medieval romance "the most common Latin word for fairy… was 'fata'" which often was used to refer to "beautiful fairy

mistresses" and to groups of dancing fairies that appeared to solitary knights in the forest (5). The faery lady in Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" is at the same time beautiful, tempting and a femme fatale. She arguably symbolizes mankind's ambiguous relationship with the forest; we inexplicably yearn to enter the primordial forest, yet its dangers are known to us. In addition, the poem makes use of another common trope found in literary depictions of the murky forest i.e. sleep. Like Bilbo and the dwarves, the Athenians in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the protagonist in the Middle English *Sir Orfeo*, the speaker in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" falls asleep in the otherworldly twilight forest, which represents the unconscious and the dream world. The very air of the forest seems to bring forth a certain sense of nostalgia and a feeling of drowsiness. This sense of otherworldliness manifests itself also in the way time behaves in the twilight forest; days quickly turn into years in the murky forest of nostalgia, as evident in the Middle English romance *Sir Launfal* dating from the late 14th-century, where the protagonist in the end retires into the forest, where he is said to dwell with the fairies till eternity.

The thick foliage of deep and dense murky forests prevents the sun from casting her rays upon the forest floor, and thus illuminating the traveler's path. Consequently, the twilight forest represents the sense of uncertainty and disorientation felt by those who do not know the way. The guardians and shepherds of the forest, the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the elves in *The Hobbit*, for example, are of the forest and call it their home, and thus the murkiness does not prevent them from seeing; they are not as susceptible to the enchantments of the forest. The gloom of the forest not only causes the visitor to lose his or her way, but also plays upon the imagination and the innate sense of awe that descends upon the traveller. The literary murky forest draws from the culturally specific myths and legends that influence our conceptions of the forest. Thus, the age-old legends of the forest as home for supernatural entities manifest themselves in British literature from the Anglo-Saxon period until present day. In Thomas Chestre's *Sir Launfal*, the protagonist enters a faery forest and finds "a pavilion, which stood with mirth and much honor", and which was decorated with jewels that not even Alexander the Great or King Arthur possessed (260-275). This passage emphasizes the otherworldliness of the forest and its residents.

According to Keith Harrison, the forest is a place "where protagonists get lost, meet unusual creatures, undergo spells and transformations and confront their destinies" (169). In this paper, "twilight" is defined as an intermediary state, between the absolute light and the absolute darkness; it is neither purely wild nor purely utopian, but rather a fantastical place, a place where the forest and its magical residents play on the imagination of the visitors. The natural gloom of the forest, a sense of tiredness and disorientation due to lack of light or enchantment and confusing pathways all appear as obstacles for the mortal men and women who enter the forest. In British literature, the murky forest is a place of transformation and alteration of one's identity. The trees in "Cad Goddeau", the protagonists in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Bilbo in *The Hobbit*, all are transformed either physically or spiritually in the forest. The forest itself or its magical inhabitants cause the characters to exist forever changed in the forest. As the protagonist enters the twilight forest, he enters into his own consciousness and is forced to introspect; he tries to understand the forest based on his perceptions and knowledge, but the murkiness prevents him from seeing and understanding the forces behind the trees, and therefore it remains unexplainable. In the British imagination, the murky and the dreamlike forest is a place that symbolizes that which perhaps once was; elves, faeries and magic.

## 2.2 Three Case Studies

### *2.2.1 Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

*Sir Gawain* is considered to be one of the most important poems of the Middle English period, notwithstanding that the author of the poem has remained a mystery. The exact date of publication is also unclear, but the text is supposed to have been composed at the end of the 14$^{th}$ -century. The poem itself is likely influenced by continental, mainly French Arthurian lore and rather closely adheres to the customs and structure of the genre of chivalric romance. *Sir Gawain*, however, distinguishes itself with a complex use of different forest and woodland motifs and allusions, and like Barbara Bolt in her dissertation argues, the poem represents nature and forests as uncontrollable and uncontained proving grounds for the protagonist (7). Consequently, I have chosen *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as an example text to represent the conceptual category of the forest as wilderness, and because its theme

of chivalric quest in the forest connects it with *The Wind in The Willows* and to Mole's solitary mission.

As a chivalric romance, the story is essentially based on the motif of a knight on a quest. The narrative exploits the juxtaposition of the civilized court and the forest wilderness and employs the ancient literary device of movement from civilization i.e. the court into the wild forest; Sir Gawain is presented a challenge that forces him to leave the court and thus civilization, and enter a new realm where he is faced with various challenges. Similar movement takes place in *The Wind in the Willows*, where Mole, momentarily taking on the symbolic role of a knight, leaves the pastoral idyll behind in order to quench his thirst for knowledge and curiosity. In both stories, the forest quest ends with the hero reaching "the wild man of the woods", who instructs him and helps him in his transformation. Furthermore, in *Sir Gawain* the forest functions both as a symbol for the wild and the dangerous, and as a symbolic place for archetypal situations; adventure, challenges and proving one's courage.

In the poem, the contrast between courtly life and the wild is carefully constructed. Arthur's court at Camelot is described as a place where "loyal lords, lads of the best" dwell in "gladness and glee glorious to hear" and "with all the meals and mirth that man could devise" (Benson 5). A similar contrast is initially found in *The Wind in the Willows*, where Mole and Rat are enjoying their pastoral idyll by the river until Mole's curiosity leads him to journey to the Wild Wood, against the advice of the others. The court in *Sir Gawain* is also a place of status-quo; only after the Green Knight, the antagonist of the story, emerges from the wilderness and enters the court to challenge Gawain, must the protagonist leave the comforts of the court in order to fulfill his promise and adhere to the chivalric code. Gawain is aware of the dangers and terrors that he will face during his quest, but Arthur reminds him of his duty as a knight: "Now, think well, Sir Gawain, / lest for fear of what thou began, / thou from this adventure refrain / that thou hast taken in hand"; when a knight accepts a quest, he must see it through (Benson 37). As Gawain leaves Arthur's court to pursue his quest "into the forest of Wirral, the wilderness" (Benson 55) where only a few are loved by God, the forest is established as an archetypal symbol for the wild and the dangerous, where Gawain has to fight foes, both natural and supernatural in harsh weather conditions in order to advance:

> Sometimes with dragons he wars, and with wolves also,
> Sometimes with wild men, that dwelt in the woods,
> Both with bulls and bears, and boars at other times,
> And ogres that him annoyed, from the high rocks;
> Were he not doughty and enduring, and the dear Lord served,
> Doubtless he had been dead, and done for full oft.
> For war worried him not so much; that winter was worse,
> When the cold clear water, from the clouds shed,
> And froze ere it fall might, to the faded earth. (Benson 55)

Furthermore, Gawain, who "far flown from his friends, as a foreigner…rides" (Benson 55) is forced to journey alone in the forest, leaving his fellow knights and the comfort of society behind and facing the wilderness unassisted. Gawain's quest shares many similarities with that of Mole and in his solitary journey into the Wild Wood in *The Wind in the Willows* as both protagonists enter the forest alone, are faced with difficult weather conditions and encounter hostile animals. As a knight, Gawain is able to fight through the obstacles and vanquish his enemies, but the inexperienced Mole, on the other hand, begins to realize the mistake he has made in travelling to the forest alone, unprepared, and not yet ready to take on the role of the knight.

For Gawain, the wild forest symbolizes the impending doom; it is his duty to enter the forest in search of the Green Knight and honour the agreement he made with him. During his quest he finds temporary joy and comfort from a prince's castle, where he engages in romantic quests and other folly, but as he leaves again for the Green chapel, the abode of the Green Knight, Gawain once again enters the forest, a place where there is "no place to hide, no haven to protect him" (Benson 161). Finally, after meeting with the Green Knight and completing his quest, Gawain slowly begins to understand the true lesson of his quest; through his solitary wandering he has been forced to introspect, and even though he is a capable knight who can survive the wilderness, his real weakness lies within himself and in his character. As Gawain realizes the folly of his actions and his own vanity, he begins

to repent and hangs a lace sash around his neck to symbolize his sins (Benson 183). As he returns to Arthur's court, he is celebrated for his bravery but also for his newfound truthfulness, honesty and repentance (Benson 187). Similarly, as Mole completes his quest in the forest with the help of his companion Rat, and enters the abode of Badger, he discovers something essential about himself and about his place in the world. Both characters exist the wild forest transformed.

As Barbara Bolt suggests, an eco-critical reading of Sir Gawain's violent encounter with the natural world is also possible; the confrontation represents the incompatibility between high culture and nature, or mankind's unwillingness to integrate with the wilderness (13). The knight destroys every obstacle, including nature that stand in his way. The forest in *Sir Gawain* therefore most closely adheres to the concept of the forest as wilderness; for the protagonist it is an inhospitable and desolate location, where weather conditions and animals pose a threat to human condition. However, a chivalric adventure into the wild forest may provide the brave explorer with truths and lessons otherwise unattainable. Gawain learns about loyalty and chivalric code, whereas Mole learns to appreciate the advice and warnings given by friends, to value company, but also to overcome his own fears and limitations.

Ultimately, the wild forest functions as a place of absolution for Gawain; he leaves the court and embarks on an adventure that includes tests and perils, and finally he finds solace in the Green chapel, in the middle of the forest. The forest becomes then a symbolical place for existential quest of self-discovery. The Green Knight, whose connection to vegetation and fertility rituals and gods is apparent in his appearance and in the decapitation trope, which according to Verner constructs "a relationship between the beheading of the Green Knight and the changing of the seasons" is very much associated with the Green Man (135). The Green Knight, like the Green Man both instruct and guide the traveler to face his or her fears and to conquer them. Like Gawain, Mole in *The Wind in the Willows,* enters a menacing forest and is initially terrified by its nocturnal sounds and hostile weather conditions. However, by the end of his adventure, Mole like the Knight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* has uncovered hidden and unconscious truths about himself and the surrounding world.

### *2.2.2 A Gest of Robyn Hode*

Being one of the oldest surviving tales of Robin Hood, printed c. 1500, *A Gest of Robyn Hode* not only provides the reader with an archetypal representation of the forest as a symbolic place of refuge and anarchy, but the text also exemplifies the continuing fascination with forests during the Middle English period. The story itself follows the famous pattern that many more recent adaptations of the adventures of Robin Hood have adopted; Greenwood Forest, later changed into Sherwood Forest, functions as Robin's hideout from whence he and his band of outlaws carry out their rebellion towards the king's forest laws and the sheriff of Nottingham. The Greenwood Forest is presented as a utopian space where men live in harmony with each other and with nature, and where even common men can be powerful and free. This archetypal woodland trickster figure who rebels against the civilized world is repeated in J.M.Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*, where the protagonist, sharing many similarities in appearance and in characteristics with Robin, "clad in skeleton leaves and the juices that ooze out of trees" (*Peter Pan* 11), fights against the outside world. The symbolism surrounding both figures also seems to suggest a link to older pagan vegetation deities, like Pan and the Green Man, which will be discussed in this chapter.

Based on my reading, the Greenwood of Robyn Hode is influenced by the notion of Arcadia as it mirrors an idealized picture of mankind's mythical past and the Golden Age. The forest in *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, like the Neverwood in *Peter and Wendy*, is indeed a society or a world of its own; it is neither a mere place of adventure for Robin nor is it a place of magic. Robin and his followers live in the forest, hold competitions in the forest, trade in the forest and thrive in the forest. Robin and his "mery meyné" cleverly and respectfully take care of and guard their utopian forest society and the "grene wode tre", under which they reside, much like the Arcadian god Pan (Waltz 356). A similar Arcadian ecosystem is found in *Peter and Wendy*; where Peter too resides in a utopian forest, has his own group of followers and rebels against the outside world and time itself. Both Peter and Robin, though arguably harkening back to more innocent time when man and nature existed in a state of harmony, indeed possess a wilder, or pagan side too, which manifests itself in their anarchical and Dionysian rebellion against external authorities. It is

exactly this resistance against the civilized world that functions as the central force in both narratives.

For Robin, the Arcadian forest also symbolizes vitality and regeneration; after a long adventure outside the forest "Whan he came to grene wode, / In a mery mornynge, / There he herde the notes small / Of byrdes mery syngynge," the return to the merry woodland from the outside world is a relief (Waltz 392). Peter too becomes reinvigorated, "his eyes were sparkling" (Barrie 56) as he returns to Neverland and to his own kingdom. The ecocritical notion regarding the forest as utopia and as the archaic and primordial home of man is repeated here as the dichotomy of wilderness and civilization is reversed in the text; man is most happy when living attuned with nature, not in the courts and cities.

Furthermore, the utopian Greenwood Forest, an archetypal home for outlaws, constitutes an alternative society, where individuals adhere to different norms and laws than the men and women who live in cities and courts. However, Robyn and his outlaws are no primitive and uncultivated wild men; they are capable of acting civilized when they deem it suitable. In essence, they represent the "noble savages" as envisioned by Rousseau. Furthermore, Joseph Taylor argues that Greenwood Forest is a place "where natural law and positive law harmonize" indicating that Robyn and his followers are able to unite the two worlds (332). However, the different worlds of Robyn and the king do not co-exist peacefully, and as the characters move between these worlds, the changing rules and realities pose challenges to them. After a year of traveling outside his forest abode, Robyn exclaims:

> My welthe is went away.
>
> Somtyme I was an archere good,
>
> A styffe and eke a stronge;
>
> I was comted the best archere
>
> That was in mery Englonde.
>
> Alas! then sayd good Robyn,
>
> Alas and well a woo!

Yf I dwele lenger with the kynge,

Sorowe wyll me sloo. (Waltz 391)

Outside his kingdom, his identity is threatened. Similarly, Peter Pan's identity is threatened as he leaves his realm; not only does he feel alienated in the outside world, he literally loses a part of his persona i.e. his shadow. In the outside world Peter and Robin are not complete. However, this feeling of alienation and unfamiliarity does not affect just Peter and Robin, but also those who enter their worlds; in *A Gest of Robyn Hode* both the king and the sheriff are vulnerable and feel out of place in the Greenwood Forest, and in *Peter and Wendy*, Wendy, John and Michael move from the known reality into the utopian no place of Neverland, where Peter is the absolute authority.

This Arcadian aspect to the Greenwood Forest is strengthened by the very character of Robyn Hode, whose depiction abounds in mythical and metaphorical symbolism. As Little John is reciting his life in the woods, he says:

I have be in this forest;

A fayre syght can I se;

It was one of the fayrest syghtes

That ever yet sawe I me.

Yonder I sawe a ryght fayre harte,

His coloure is of grene;

Seven score of dere upon a herde

Be with hym all bydene. (Waltz 340)

He describes Robyn Hode as almost a supernatural entity and as a central power within the forest realm. Robin Hood's connection to paganism is also discussed by Gary Varner, who points to the association of the literary figure and the pagan May Day festival (135). Varner continues that Robin, like Peter "wore the fairies' colour, green" (136). Robin and Peter can both be interpreted as stewards or guardians of the Arcadian forest like the Greek Pan, as they both battle against hostile outside forces.

In addition, the character of Robin Hood seems to embody the Jungian archetype of the eternal child, an archetype also at the center of the narrative in *Peter and Wendy*. Both Robin and Peter appear as youthful, at times whimsical trickster figures, enjoying the occasional mischief and revelry. The eternal child, existing out of time, represents the counterforce to the inevitable progression of time that affects us all, and the unconscious will to return to this pre-conscious state of happiness and simplicity i.e. a utopia. As Ralph Hallman observes, the theme of abandonment is "most necessary aspect of this archetype" (66). While Peter and the Lost Boys were abandoned as a child, Robin and his outlaws were metaphorically abandoned by civilization.

In *A Gest of Roby Hode*, the forest society in Greenwood consists of Robin, the leader and the merry men. This utopian society in many ways mirrors that of the outside world; Robin is the monarch who holds his court under the greenwood tree, while the other outlaws serve him. Consequently, there exists a clear hierarchy in the forest; the men look up to Robin as their absolute leader, who has to but blow a horn and "all the outlawes of that forest / That horne coud they knowe, / And gadred them togyder, / In a lytell throwe; / Seven score of wyght yonge men / Came redy on a rowe" (Waltz 393). Robin's kingdom, unlike the outside civilization, however, manages to combine nature and civilization; it is at the same time a place of natural order and human society. In *Peter and Wendy*, the Lost Boys not only regard Peter as their leader, but also as a father figure; they depend upon him to a greater extent than the merry men do with Robin. The Lost Boys are not as skilled warriors as the merry men of Robin Hood, but require protection provided not only by Peter, but also by the Indians, who with their "naked bodies" and their ability to move through nature without making a sound represent the natural man (*Peter Pan* 62). Thus, both forest utopias incorporate aspects of the outside world into their Arcadias.

In conclusion, the Greenwood Forest of *A Gest of Robyn Hode* is a good example of the literary forest as utopia; it is an alternative society for outlaws who live outside the laws of the king, yet in harmony with each other and with nature. The forest society has its own moral and ethical norms, and as a place outside the dominion of the king is inhospitable to those who attempt to impose alien laws and norms upon it. The outlaws, and Robin especially are evil only in the eyes of the established law and

its guardians, but to each other they are loyal and helpful. Their lives resemble those of the Virgilian shepherds; through hunting and living in the forest they have established themselves as the protectors of the woodland kingdom that opposes and resists the oppressing outside world.

### *2.2.3 A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Shakespeare's literary woodland in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is, based on my reading, a good literary example of the twilight forest that echoes a sense of nostalgia; it is a fantastical place of faeries, magic and transformations, a place of that which once was. It is neither a pure wilderness that threatens the visitor, nor is it a utopia; like twilight, is represents the state between two worlds. In my reading, the fairy forest also represents the unconscious, as it is a dreamlike place of altered states of mind and confused identities, and is closely tied to the notion of the Otherworld. Like Mirkwood in *The Hobbit*, the forest in *Midsummer Night's Dream* is ruled by supernatural entities, fairies and elves, who arguably ascend the very much a human dichotomy of good and evil. Consequently, the murkiness and the moral ambiguity of the forest in both texts rises from a sense of unexplainable queerness that the confrontation of two worlds, human and non-human, evokes in the minds of the men and women who enter the forest. The play itself centers on the dichotomy of the Athenian court and the mystical forest, the latter of which functions as a kingdom of the faeries, and as a pivotal narrative device. Besides the very ending of the play, the two arenas, the conscious and the unconscious are distinctly separate, and the supernatural is strictly confined into the forest, and only affects those who deliberately enter it (Bettelheim 94, Pask 23). Therefore the four lovers and the actors who willingly enter the twilight forest become subjected to its spells, illusions and forces, which eventually lead them to return to the Athenian court changed and transformed.

A further similarity between Shakespeare's fairy forest and Tolkien's Mirkwood lies in the symbolical descriptions of night and darkness. Whereas the darkness associated with the forests of wilderness merely anticipates danger and evil, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the night denotes a strong presence of magic and the supernatural; Shakespeare is clearly inspired by older folklore where the nighttime is commonly seen as the time of fairies and spirits who "run by the triple Hecate's

team, / From the presence of the sun, / following darkness like a dream" (V.i.371-374). Shakespeare further develops this association of night and the Otherworld by having the Puck, a fairy, cast spells upon the mortal Athenians as they sleep. As the lovers sleep and enter the unconscious, Puck pours love potion distilled from a flower on their eyes, causing them to fall in love with the first person they see after slumber (II.ii.70-85). The "death-counterfeiting" sleeping state thus signifies being more susceptible to illusions and otherworldly powers, as it enables one to leave the mortal realm (III.ii.364). Thus, the twilight forest becomes a place where the supernatural plays upon and influences the unconscious mind of the visitor. Oberon, Titania and Puck do not, however, act out of malice or attempt to harm the human visitors, and as a matter of fact they end up helping them in their love struggles. Thus the murkiness of Shakespeare's forest symbolizes exposure to otherworldly influences. Tolkien's Mirkwood makes use of a similar connection between darkness and the supernatural. Dwarves, a race that is used to live and work in the shadows of their underground caverns and halls, find the darkness of Mirkwood somehow different, somehow much more unexplainable and everlasting as they "dozed in the enormous uncanny darkness" (*The Hobbit* 133). Like in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the tropes of sleep and dreams are important in the Mirkwood narrative; Bombur has a dream in the forest where he encounters "a woodland king…with a crown of leaves" (*The Hobbit* 141). One night, Kili observes that "there is a regular blaze of light…not far away–hundreds of torches and many fires must have been lit suddenly and by magic. And hark to the singing and the harps" (*The Hobbit* 144). This enchanting sight lures the company into an elven feast taking place in the middle of the forest, the very same that appeared to one of the dwarves in his sleep. Bombur's dream was thus a prophecy. Tolkien further emphasizes the otherworldliness of Mirkwood by stating that the company initially had to pass through "a sort of arch leading into a gloomy tunnel made by two great trees that leant together, too old and strangled with ivy and hung with lichen to bear more than a few blackened leaves" (*The Hobbit* 131). The passage clearly indicates a movement from one world into another.

The themes of time, forgetfulness and sexual desire are also central in Shakespeare's sylvan lore; time in the otherworldly forest does not proceed as it does in the Athenian court, and dreams become intertwined with and affect reality.

Demetrius, for example, after exiting the forest wonders whether he is awake or still dreaming as the whole adventure in the fairy kingdom appears as a dreamlike memory (IV.i.193-195). This feeling of confusion also emphasizes the dichotomy of the court and the magic forest. Likewise, the trope of forgetfulness appears in *The Hobbit* where Bombur falls into an enchanted river in Mirkwood and drifts into a dream world. Having woken, he cannot remember anything that had happened in the forest (*The Hobbit* 141). The motif recurs in *The Wind in the Willows* too, as the Mole and the Rat are enchanted by the dreamlike illusion of the woodland god Pan, who aids them in their quest, but at the end forces the characters to forget the entire incident and return to the conscious world. As the twilight forest is connected to the unconscious dream state, the hero returning from it may or may not remember the actual events that took place there, though he may be forever changed by them. In addition, Shakespeare's forest is a place where the absurdities of sexual desire and attraction are exhibited; people go mad over their lust and need for love, and in the battle between Oberon and Titania, manufactured sexual desire is used as a weapon. Though sanitized from sexuality, the theme of frenzied desire is indeed strongly present also in Tolkien's forest narrative; in the halls of the elven king Thranduil, the company is given a chance to be released from captivity if they accept a bargain proposed by the elven king. However, Thorin's absurd desire for gold, his only true love, blinds him and thus renders him unable to negotiate for their release. Mirkwood thus becomes a place where Thorin's emotions conquer his rational side.

Besides functioning as a symbolical place of self-discovery and fulfilled destinies, like many earlier wild forests of chivalric romance, the twilight forest carries another function in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The forest, as Ryan Farrar observes in his doctoral dissertation, forces men and women of higher social standing to lower their status and abandon their former identity in order to learn valuable lessons about themselves (45). At the start of the play Demetrius is oblivious of Helena, and is instead resolute on marrying Hermia, whose father is in agreement over this marriage. Demetrius continuously mistreats Helena, yet she adamantly loves him. In addition to the harsh treatment, Demetrius has once before left Helena in order to pursue Hermia indicating that Demetrius is capricious and arguably insensitive. The arranged marriage between Demetrius and Hermia, which is approved of by civilization i.e. the Athenian court, symbolizes hierarchy and order, but as Demetrius

is forced to abandon his former identity and status in the dreamlike forest, he finally comes to love Helena. The forest changes Demetrius without him noticing it so that he abandons his former rudeness and insensitivity. Similarly, Thorin and his mighty and proud dwarves are unable to use their high status to their advantage in Mirkwood, but instead become disoriented and eventually captured by the elves, the guardians of the forest. In the confusing forest, even the mighty dwarves have to accept their powerlessness, and realize that true bravery may indeed be found in smaller things.

Perhaps the most significant unifying element of Shakespeare and Tolkien's twilight forests is their inhabitants. Both Shakespeare's faeries and Tolkien's elves draw heavily from the old European sylvan and pagan tradition and mythos; Oberon, Titania, Puck, and the other faeries rule over their forest kingdom, and like the ancient capricious woodland deities play upon the minds and destinies of the mortals. Tolkien does not share Shakespeare's affinity to theatrical magic performed by the fairies, and even though Mirkwood is indeed inhabited by magical entities, elves, it is not enchanted in the obvious and visible way that Shakespeare's forest in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is. Perhaps Tolkien is attempting to depict the elves as a race that could truly have existed at some point in history, but has since disappeared or retreated into the twilight forests. Both literary forests and their inhabitants, however, seem to be greatly influenced by the Celtic Otherworld, a connection discussed in closer detail in the close reading of *The Hobbit*. Moreover, Shakespeare and Tolkien's woodland creatures differ in their sexuality; in contrast to the "erotic playfulness" of the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the elves in *The Hobbit* are de-sexualized and more restrained (Pask 140). Still, the descriptions of elves in *The Hobbit* abound in subtle allusions to pagan fertility rites, as they celebrate the spring and the rebirth of nature with green garments , and "dance and sing upon the midsummer's eve" (The Hobbit 51).

In conclusion, the fairy forest depicted by Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is an ambiguous location; it is not a utopian Arcadia nor is it a wilderness. It is a place of magic and of transformation. Shakespeare's forest, like Tolkien's Mirkwood, also represents the twilight, the eventide and the unconscious, and thus

draws inspiration from the Celtic notion of the Otherworld, a world where gods dwell, hunt and live eternally in beauty and youth.

## 3 The Forest in Early 20th-century Children's Literature

As Peter Hunt observes, "children's books have a long history around the world, and they have absorbed into themselves elements of folk, fairy tale and the oral tradition" (4). In Britain, before the middle of the 19th-century, which marked the beginning of the Golden Age of Children's literature, these children's books were often either strictly educational and instructive, preaching various ethical and religious dogmas, or "material for the sheer entertainment" for children, like chapbooks, which according to Humphrey Carpenter "played much the same part in society as lowbrow television drama does now" (2). From about 1850 onwards, however, the authors of children's stories began to combine the two elements of children's literature that today seem fundamental to the genre: entertainment and moral purpose (Carpenter 1-2). The authors realized that they could weave complex and important moral truths and lessons into entertaining and utopian visions and high fantasy, and naturally provide the children an opportunity to read about dangerous and fantastical things and discuss difficult topics without leaving the safety of their homes.

The three novels analyzed in this thesis all belong to this Golden Age. They are, moreover, connected by their symbolical use of nature motifs and fantasy; anthropomorphic animals, utopian worlds and magic are all essential to these stories. In addition, all three authors have used the forest motif as a pivotal narrative device in their novels; Grahame's Wild Wood, Barrie's Neverwood and Tolkien's Mirkwood all abound in symbolism and references to and adaptations of earlier depictions of literary forests. While Grahame's wild and dangerous forest wilderness opposes the pastoral idyll and provides a location for Mole's chivalric quest, Barrie's utopian woodland acts as a home for the god-like Peter, who simultaneously embodies both the spirit of the Arcadian god Pan and of Robin Hood. Tolkien's twilight forest, on the other hand, is an otherworldly realm of elves and self-discovery, where the boundaries of good and evil become unclear. In the following chapters I will provide a critical survey and a short synopsis of all three texts, and

then conduct a close study of the texts utilizing specific thematic and symbolic approaches.

## *3.1 The Wind in the Willows*

### 3.1.1 A Critical Survey

In my close study of Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, the focus will be on Mole's heroic transformation from symbolical boyhood into manhood i.e. on his initiation, and on the dual role of the Wild Wood in Mole's metamorphosis. In my reading, the Wild Wood functions both as a starting point for Mole's transformation as he embarks on a solitary quest to find Badger, but also as a metaphor for wilderness epitomized by the Wild Wooders that Mole valiantly drives away from Toad Hall. Thus, the forest functions both as an archetypal place of chivalric quest and solitary adventure, but also a symbol for wilderness, and as the Wild Wooders are literally "of the forest", Mole in essence both survives the forest wilderness, and eventually conquers it, as his transformation by chapter 12 is complete. However, before the actual analysis, a brief synopsis and critical survey of the text will be provided. In the critical survey, different ideas regarding the symbolism around the forest motif in the novel will be discussed, and though the interpretations of *The Wind in the Willows* and the Wild Wood presented below differ vastly in their theoretical approaches and perspectives, the forest retains its pivotal role in all of them.

Essentially, *The Wind in the Willows* presents the reader with two interlocked narratives, the adventures of Mole and Toad. The fundamental difference between these narratives is that whilst Toad's mock-heroic adventures are satirical in nature, Mole' quest of self-discovery, in which the forest both physically and metaphorically plays a pivotal role, more earnestly draws from the conventions of heroic literature. In the course of the novel's 12 chapters, Kenneth Grahame carefully constructs an idyllic pastoral world of Georgian and Edwardian English countryside, which conforming to the traditional pastoral mode is endangered by machines and other modern intrusions. This pastoral mode is emphasized by Grahame's adoption of the idea of the "middle state" or the "middle landscape", which according to Leo Marx symbolizes the "ideal blending of art and nature" (215). The River Bank and its

vicinity is situated between the absolute wilderness of the Wild Wood, the forest, and the civilization of the Wide World. Furthermore, Mole, Rat and Badger are all anthropomorphic animals who respect nature and are sensitive to its seasonal cycles, and are also interested in high culture and art. This notion of art that is inherent in the pastoral mode is also emphasized by the classical and poetic elements found in the story; Grahame makes references to Homeric legends, medieval romances and Romantic poets**.** Especially Mole and Rat could be seen as representing the Virgilian shepherd, living idyllic lives in the rural countryside, and combining in their existence the best sides of art and nature. Rat, for example, lives "by [the river] and with it and on it and in it" (7), writes nature poetry and dabbles in music, whilst Mole's home, Mole End, is a careful combination of artistic decorations and nature, as it is a place where "wire baskets with ferns" hang on the walls, plaster statuaries of Garibaldi and Queen Victoria, the former symbolizing, and perhaps foreshadowing Mole's respect and pursuit of heroic ideals, and the latter reflecting his fundamentally English sense of decency and morality, adorn the shelves and a vast ale collection all decorate the "close and airless" earthen abode of the animal (74-81). Furthermore, in the winter time, when "cold and frost and miry ways kept them much indoors" (34), the animal rustics gather to compare their notes on the past summer, which to them appeared as a play, recalling

> the languorous siesta of hot midday, deep in green undergrowth, the sun striking through in tiny golden shafts and spots; the boating and bathing of the afternoon, the rambles along dusty lanes and through yellow cornfields; and the long cool evening at last, when so many threads were gathered up, so many friendships rounded, and so many adventures planned for the morrow. (35)

In this pastoral reading, in addition to the dichotomy of the peaceful River Bank and the wild forest, the main tension in the narrative rises from the threat posed by Toad, fascinated by machines and motorcars, and the actions taken by Mole, Rat and Badger to save their foolish friend from the claws of modernity and machines. Grahame appears to be acutely aware of the social and economic changes that were taking place in Britain at the beginning of the 20$^{th}$-century, as his novel paints an

arguably idealized and nostalgic picture of the English countryside that symbolically revolts against the looming societal and cultural shift.

In this agrarian world, adventures and incidents abound, and notions of friendship, loyalty and home are highly valued. The adventures of the main characters, which start separate but eventually unite, always end happily, and the pastoral fantasy world is to a great extent sanitized from sex, violence and death, which indicates Grahame's compliance to the norms and rules of children's literature. The pastoral animal world of nostalgic English countryside provides, however, an ample source for many alternative literary and theoretical interpretations of the text and its meaning, including Marxist, feminist and biographical readings, all of which will be briefly presented below.

The Marxist interpretation, according to Humphrey Carpenter, sees *The Wind in the Willows* partly as a commentary "about the English middle class and the threat to its stability" (163). This approach is supported by the fact Kenneth Grahame lived and wrote at a time when industrialization in Edwardian England was in full swing, and social unrest and the disappearance of the nostalgic "Merry Olde England" with its appreciation of rural values were topical concerns. Consequently, the four main protagonists; Mole, Rat, Badger and Toad could be seen representing different elements of the British class system, though as John Moore observes, "it is difficult to determine the exact position of these animals within the bourgeoisie" (52). Moore continues that "Mole's taste for beer and skittles and plaster statuary, the preponderance of sardines and sausages in his larder, and his conversations with Rat about the bargains and expenses involved in furnishing his home all suggest the 'shabby genteel'" (52). Rat, on the other hand, with his interest in sailing and nature poetry, appears to be somewhat socially superior to Mole; up until chapter 9, Rat is the instructor and the helper, whilst Mole is more interested in routine and home-keeping (Grahame 3, 83-84). According to Carpenter, in this animal hierarchy Badger symbolizes the old aristocracy with his ancient and vast tunneled dwelling and his authority over the other animals (164). Toad, on the other hand, although belonging to the landed gentry, poses a real threat to the idyllic pastoral world and to class stability; his reckless behavior damages the reputation of the upper class and

violates the pastoral principles, and eventually leaves his ancestral house vacant for rioters and for revolution.

In this reading, the final chapter of the book symbolizes the clash of the upper classes and the lower classes; the four main protagonists come together and drive the weasels and stouts, the revolutionaries out of Toad's country estate, and restore the traditional rural order. Therefore the Wild Wood, the forest, represents the rebellious lower-classes, and their incompatibility with the pastoral world and its class order; as the upper middle class Mole enters the Wild Wood, he enters a world alien to him and to his values (Carpenter 165). However, Carpenter continues and observes that ultimately there is not much textual evidence to support the idea of this Marxist reading of the Wild Wood and its supposed connection to the working class, as the Wild Wooders come across more as the suitors of Penelope in the *Odyssey* (c. 8th-century BC), who have to be cast out by Ulysses before he can regain his home (166). As the chivalric and Homeric elements of *The Wind in the Willows* are the main focus in this thesis, it is also useful to take a look at the question of gender as it is discussed in the text, as both medieval courtly romances and Homer's *Odyssey* contain romantic and sexual relationships that add further layers and tensions to the narrative. In Grahame's pastoral idyll the concepts of romance and sex seem absent; neither Mole's chivalric quest into the forest nor his Homeric recapture of Toad Hall is to any extent concerned with gender. The pastoral animal society is indeed male-only, and in the Wide World, the three women function only as aids or adversaries to Toad.

Biographical literary theory provides another interesting approach to the text to its use of the forest motif, as argued by Kathryn Graham, who observes that *The Wind in the Willows* "began as a series of bedtime stories that Grahame told his son Alastair in 1904" and that was made up of "material designed to inform the child about his future education, presented in a form meant to be palatable and accessible to the four-year old audience of the oral stories" (181). As observed before, the use of fantastical elements in children's fiction, like the anthropomorphic characters of *The Wind in the Willows*, allows the author to incorporate moral truths and lessons into an entertaining and imaginative narrative. Thus, Graham argues that the author constructed the character of the innocent Mole, an animal associated with bad eye

sight, to symbolically represent young Alastair, who himself was blind (182). From a didactic perspective, Mole, like children first entering school, must learn the ways of the new world, acquire new friends and learn to stay away from the bullies. Rat, representing a senior pupil, tries to counsel Mole, as older students are more aware of the practices and realities of school life, and warns him not to enter the Wild Wood, as its inhabitants cannot be trusted (Grahame 8). In this reading, the Wild Wooders represent the students Alastair ought to avoid if he wants to succeed in school and in life. The forest then symbolizes the places where good and respectable students should not enter, the dichotomy of civilization and savagery, and as Mole defies Rat's advice, he becomes subjected to the bullying ways of the weasels and the stouts.

In conclusion, the critical survey reveals that the Wild Wood and indeed the novel itself can be interpreted in many ways; the forest can be seen representing the primitive nature that exists beyond the pastoral "middle state", as a home of the lower classes and as a kingdom of bullies. In my reading, however, I will focus on the heroic elements in the novel, and the functions of the forest in Mole's transformation.

### 3.1.2 The Wild Wood

Like the challenging forest wildernesses of *Beowulf, Sir Launfal* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the Wild Wood in *The Wind in the Willows* represents the wilderness that opposes civilized society. It is at the same time a symbolical place of adventure, of chivalric quests and of self-discovery, and a symbol of fear and disorder. The dichotomy between the pastoral "middle-state" of rivers, fields and groves, and the dark and menacing forest is carefully constructed by Kenneth Grahame, as the whole novel, according to John Moore "abounds in scenes of domestic coziness" with all the main protagonists residing in "womb-like burrows", against which the forest wilderness of Wild Wood appears particularly threatening (45). Whilst the River Bank, for example, is a place of merriment and joy, the Wild Wood is a place of terror where the River Bankers "do not go very much" as its inhabitants, save from Badger, cannot be trusted (Grahame 8). The River Bank, like the mead-hall Heorot in *Beowulf* or Arthur's court in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, represents the court from whence the adventures of the protagonists begin. It

is the court of medieval romance, full of food, merriment and solace, which must be left behind in order to truly transform oneself. Consequently, in chapter 1 the River Bank is depicted as a homely place where after an exciting day at the river “a bright fire [burns] in the parlour”, thrilling stories “about weirs, and sudden floods, and leaping pike” are told, and cheerful suppers are eaten (15). In the River Bank, Mole dwells in “great peace and contentment” (15). However, already in chapter 1 Mole’s quest into the Wild Wood is foreshadowed, as his curiosity towards the unknown is awakened; he asks Rat if life by the river would not get “a bit dull at times” and wonders what lies beyond (7). Mole learns that the dark forest that lay behind the river is the home of Badger, an animal “who lived his own life by himself, in his hole in the middle of the Wild Wood”, and as Badger rarely left his home, in order for Mole to reach and make acquaintance with him, Mole is compelled to leave the safety of his home, “the court” and enter the forest wilderness, against the advice of Rat (34).

Therefore, Mole’s first adventure, his chivalric quest to the Wild Wood, culminates in him finding Badger, a hermit residing in the middle of the forest, who thus resembles the Green Knight or Merlin from the medieval romances, as he plays an important role in the education and development of Mole. Furthermore, in both *The Wind in the Willows* and in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, seasons have specific symbolical value in the narrative; as Mole embarks on his chivalric quest into the wintry forest of the Wild Wood, he, as Michael Mendelson observes, violates the natural pattern of animals, who usually hibernate during winter (131). Thus, Mole’s first quest is not as successful as the second quest that takes place in summer, which is traditionally associated with life and activity. In Sir Gawain, as Susan Clark observes, ” the description of the seasons reflects the structure of the poem as a whole, for progression from winter to verdant nature to winter again mirrors Gawain's journey from Arthur's court to the court of Bercilak/the Green Knight” (12). Both authors therefore make use of the symbolism associated with the seasons and progression of the year.

Whilst Mole’s quest into the Wild Wood is arguably influenced by the medieval romance, as he, like the knights of courtly romance, enters the forest wilderness alone in order to reach his goal, Mole’s second heroic quest of recapturing Toad Hall

clearly draws from another literary tradition, as he instead of surviving the forest wilderness, fights against the metaphorical wild forest that has taken over Toad Hall, represented by the wild and dangerous Wild Wooders. This second mission draws heavily from the Homeric tradition; like Ulysses, Mole and the other protagonists must banish the Wild Wooders out of Toad Hall in order to reclaim it. Grahame cleverly modifies the Homeric trope of home-coming and emphasizes the role of the forest wilderness in the invasion.

In my reading, *The Wind in the Willows*, though a children's novel, treats these epic and heroic themes with respect rather than satire, and while death, true violence and sex are not part of Grahame's heroic ethos, Geraldine Poss, for example, argues that the author is simply utilizing artistic freedom and "being eclectic about what he can include in his own ideal world" (86). Grahame's omission of certain elements by no means makes Mole's quest and transformation a parody, as evident, for example, in Mole's fearful encounter with "the terror of the Wild Wood" (39), a narrative trope that in my reading parallels Sir Gawain's solitary journey from Arthur's court into the Forest of Wirral in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Both Mole and Gawain encounter wild and hostile animals, struggle with solitude and lose their way during their forest quests. In addition, Gawain who "in pain and peril" and through "many a hardship" journeys through the Forest of Wirral alone (57), Mole, assisted by Rat, also has to push forward despite his fatigue and challenging weather conditions and survive in the hostile forest. Furthermore, Mole, unlike Toad, is portrayed as a valiant knight in chapter 12, which recites the Homeric recapture of Toad Hall, as he carefully arms and prepares himself before the attack, during which Mole, "black and grim" strides "wrathfully into the room", wields his weapon and shouts war-cries as he forces the terrified weasels and ferrets to "dive under the tables and spring madly up at the windows" (197-198). The chivalric nature of this conquest is even further emphasized by the title of chapter 11, *Like Summer Tempests Came His Tears*, which is an allusion to a poem by Alfred Tennyson. With this trope, Grahame is both reminding the reader of the importance of home, and of the great pain caused by losing it. Consequently, as the heroic Mole succeeds in his final mission, he also brings Toad deliverance. Thus, Grahame is portraying the heroic transformation of Mole by utilizing old heroic literary conventions and motifs, albeit omitting certain sexual and violent elements from his story.

Mole's solitary quest into the forest represents the first stage in his transformation; in chapter one, taking place in spring, traditionally associated with re-birth, Mole emerges from his underground abode and enters the outside world, where he encounters the Water Rat, who he quickly befriends. Mole's inexperience, boyish naivety and impatience soon lead him foolishly attempting to steer Rat's boat, against the advice of Rat, who explicitly tells him to "wait till you've had a few lessons. It's not as easy as it looks" (Grahame 13). Rat appears as the educator and Mole, who has just recently entered this new world, as the young boy receiving education. Mole's inexperience shows again in chapter 2, where he, unlike Rat, is unable to be critical of Toad's boasting and eloquent chatter, but instead becomes allured by it. At this stage, the inexperienced Mole hasn't developed a critical way of seeing things, and is very much dependent on the advice of others. A turning point comes in chapter 3, which indeed takes place in winter, a time of contemplation and hibernation for animals, Mole's curiosity and yearning for knowledge takes over, as he decides to enter the forest wilderness, the Wild Wood, again against the advice of Rat, who adheres to the seasonal pattern, spending his days sleeping, writing poetry and doing small domestic jobs (Grahame 34). Again, similarities between Mole's quest and the medieval romances abound, as the adventure requires movement from civilization into wilderness, and like Sir Gawain, Mole, the metaphorical knight on a quest, also embarks on this journey alone. As Sir Gawain leaves the court in search for the Green Knight, Mole leaves the River Bank in search of Badger, who resides deep in the forest. Essentially, both narratives focus on the protagonists' quest of self-discovery in the forest, where the wilderness and solitude force them to introspect and leave the forest transformed. The quests culminate in the protagonists reaching the abode of the forest hermit; the Green Knight and Badger, respectively. However, as Mole's transformation has only just begun, he is unaware of the necessary preparations he should have taken before entering the forest, and thus he leaves the River Bank unarmed and in winter season, when the weather conditions are particularly challenging. Thus, Mole's first quest is unsuccessful as he needs Rat in order to survive in the wilderness.

In chapter 3, the Wild Wood is very much the dark forest of wilderness; it lies before Mole "low and threatening, like a black reef in some still southern sea" (36). As Mole enters the forest, he is initially able to retain his childish optimism, but

gradually his imagination becomes more and more affected by the darkness, sounds and events of the forest. As Mole travels deeper and deeper into the forest, "where the light was less, and trees crouched nearer and nearer" the Wild Wood begins to creep upon Mole's imagination, slowly pushing his optimism aside and evoking irrational fears; the darkness starts to work on the solitary mind, and Mole begins to see faces in the trees, "all fixing on him glances of malice and hatred: all hard-eyed and evil and sharp" (Grahame 37). Once again, Mole's inexperience shows, as he lets his emotions take over. This "terror of the Wild Wood" leads to disorientation, again a common trope in chivalric romances, and Mole plunges "into the untrodden places of the wood" (37-38). Grahame continuously adds layers to the ever-increasing panic and terror of Mole, as he next begins to hear voices coming from unknown sources; Mole begins to think that the whole forest is becoming hostile towards him, and that "they were up and alert and ready… and he − he was alone, and unarmed, and far from any help; and the night was closing in" (38). Mole's imagination is running rampant, he is acutely aware of his solitude, his unpreparedness and the coming night; it starts to become apparent that Mole is not yet able to become the knight. However, the hardships Mole experiences in the forest are pivotal in the process of transformation, as he slowly proves his worthiness during the novel.

At the same time Rat, more experienced than Mole, is preparing to enter the forest and rescue his friend. During Mole's first quest, it is actually Rat who takes on much of the chivalric imagery as he, like a knight, carefully arms himself before plunging "without hesitation into the wood", where the same wicked faces that frightened Mole "vanished immediately at sight of the valorous animal" (40). When the experienced Rat finds Mole, as the parent who finds a lost and sobbing child, he comforts the animal, and repeats that the forest is safe only for those who know its secrets; the initiated (Grahame 41). Even as Mole's solitude turns into company, the forest quickly re-establishes its hostility toward the adventurers, as the weather conditions become more extreme:

> The snow was getting so deep that they could hardly drag their little legs through it, and the trees were thicker and more like each other than ever. There seemed to be no end to this wood, and no beginning, and no difference in it, and worst of all, no way out. (43)

Just as the terror of the forest is reaching its climax, the adventurers accidentally stumble across a trap door that leads them into the abode of Badger, the wise hermit who plays an important role in Mole's transformation, and whose dwelling marks the end of Mole's first quest. It also symbolizes the return from wilderness into civilization, as Badger's hermitage represents an outpost of civility in the wilderness.

Badger's abode "seemed a place where heroes could fitly feast after victory" (51), a line whose alliteration according to Humphrey Carpenter "faintly recalls Anglo-Saxon verse", and hints "at the mead-halls of…Beowulf" (162). The heroes, Mole and Rat, have survived the forest wilderness, and reached their destination, Badger's hall, which similarly to Merlin's forest abode in Geoffrey Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* (c. 1150) is a "hall within the forest [that] counters evil society" (Saunders 119). Mole, like Sir Gawain has managed to reach his destination in the forest, and suddenly the horrors and dangers of Wild Wood were "miles and miles away, and all that they had suffered in it a half-forgotten dream" (51). However, the meeting with Badger, the wise hermit, functions as the catalyst to Mole's second and final heroic quest; the Homeric recapture of Toad Hall, where Mole finally is capable of assuming the role of the chivalric knight, without the aid of others.

Furthermore, Badger represents the wise instructor who helps Mole to rise from boyhood into manhood. Like Merlin, the "Wild Man of the Woods", Badger has a strange visionary power that allows him to see the inexperience of Mole (Saunders 119). Badger says unto Mole "I see you don't understand, and I must explain it to you" and thus in the same way that the Green Knight helped Sir Gawain to value honesty and loyalty, Badger educates Mole on the history of the Wild Wood, on its inhabitants and on the nature of animals and men in general (61). This symbolizes an important change in Mole's character as the forest is no longer just a mysterious entity or a shadow, as Badger explains that "The Wild Wood is pretty well populated by now; with all the usual lot, good, bad, and indifferent…It takes all sorts to make a world" (62-63). Mole's boyish understanding of the forest and indeed the world itself becomes transformed, as he learns that the forest is not purely evil, but more complex. To mark his initiation, Badger tells Mole, who has now completed his first quest, that he will have no more trouble in the forest, as he has now completed the first stage in his chivalric quest. After returning to the River Bank, Mole realizes that

the forest adventure has taught him something valuable about himself too: He is an animal of "the cultivated garden plot" who is happy to stay where "lines were laid and which held adventure enough, in their way, to last for a lifetime" and avoid "the clash of actual conflict" (64-65).

Mole's second quest, the Homeric recapture of Toad Hall, requires him, however, to encounter the forest wilderness again. In chapter 11, Toad Hall, now vacant due to Toad's imprisonment, is besieged by the Wild Wooders, who represent the forest wilderness. In the face of the imminent invasion of this wilderness, Mole and Badger "stuck out, through thick and thin" in defense of the estate of their friend (177). However, "one dark night–it was very dark night…a band of weasels, armed to the teeth" began their attack and drove Mole and Badger away after a short fight (178). These paragraphs reveal a major shift in Mole's character; he has transformed into the knight, who even in the face of overwhelming opposition holds his ground and remains loyal to his friends. Mole proves his bravery again as he is willing to watch and study the weasels and stouts that have inhabited Toad Hall "camping out in the open, in every sort of weather, living very rough by day and lying very hard by night" (182). Whilst the hard weather conditions in Wild Wood posed a serious threat to the inexperienced Mole, after his transformation he is capable of resisting them. Mole also takes part in "scheming and planning and contriving" how to get Toad's property back, and even independently decides to carry out a mission of "divide and conquer", planting mistrust and doubt into the minds of the Wild Wooders before the actual attack, a scheme applauded by Badger as he praises Mole as having "more sense in [his] little finger than some other animals have in the whole of their fat bodies" (182, 192).

The Wild Wooders; weasels and the stouts, who belong to the forest, vandalize Toad Hall, spending their days eating, drinking and singing vulgar songs (179). Symbolically, the forest wilderness has invaded civilization, and Mole must therefore battle against it. However, unlike in his first quest in the Wild Wood, Mole is now ready to assume the role of the knight, and is no longer dependent on other's help. The actual recapture of Toad Hall is a very different kind of quest compared to Mole's adventure in the forest; instead of being a solitary traveller, this time Mole is accompanied by all three of his friends. This time Mole is also prepared to fight; he

has a belt, a sword, a cutlass, “a pair of pistols, a policeman’s truncheon, several sets of handcuffs, some bandages and sticking-plaster” indicating that he is prepared for battle (194). The fighting that ensues in Toad Hall sees the four protagonists triumph over the Wild Wooders in heroic fashion, as the antagonists flee in terror “when the four Heroes strode wrathfully into the room” (198). The trembling and frightened Mole of chapter 3 has transformed into a “black and grim” warrior shouting his terrible war-cry as he destroys the obstacles in his way (198). After the victory, Mole continues to show his growing maturity as he himself becomes the educator to the weasel prisoners, who due to Mole’s magnanimous treatment of them become penitent and promise to do anything for the four protagonists to make up the mess (200-201).

In conclusion, Mole’s heroic transformation consists of two very different adventures; his unsuccessful chivalric quest into the forest, and his valorous Homeric recapture of Toad Hall. The forest plays an important role in both of these quests, both functioning as an archetypal location of proving one’s bravery and as a symbol of chaos and disorder that is embodied in the Wild Wooders. In my reading, Mole’s journey to the forest is influenced by medieval romances like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Sir Orfeo*, whereas his second quest, the recapture of Toad Hall, draws inspiration from Homer’s *Ulysses*. In Grahame’s version of the Homeric home-coming, the forest that has invaded civilization has to be banished by Mole, who now is capable of defeating the same enemy he succumbed to earlier. Essentially, the forest is the enemy, which Mole has to defeat in order to transform himself. Furthermore, the wild forest in *The Wind in the Willows* stands in opposition to civilization i.e. the River Bank, which also functions as the starting place of Mole’s adventures. The Wild Wood is thus influenced both by the forest wildernesses of medieval courtly romance, and by the archetypal conception of the forest as a symbol of chaos and disorder that opposes civilization.

## *3.2 Peter and Wendy*

### 3.2.1 A Critical Survey

Whether read as a sentimental story about childhood, innocence and adventure, or as an enigmatic narrative open to, for example, various psychological and socio-

historical interpretations, J.M Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* (1911) has become one of the best known and most beloved works written during the Golden Age of children's literature, and unlike Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows, Peter and Wendy* was an instant success amongst its Edwardian audience (Humphrey Carpenter 170). Later, the main protagonist, a boy who never grew up, and the fantastic realm of the Neverland have indeed become cultural icons in Western imagination, and perennial source materials for film, television and theatrical productions (Allison Kavey 2).

Due to this continued popularity and the novel's surprisingly complex themes, symbols and characterizations, literary critics and scholars have also shown repeated interest in the story of Peter Pan, often approaching the text from radically different theoretical perspectives. However, only a few scholars have focused on the sylvan and even pagan characteristics of Peter Pan who seems to reflect archetypal features of older woodland figures of literature, like his namesake from Greek legends, the Green Man, and Robin Hood. Similarly, the utopian features of the Neverland, and the Neverwood forest, are rarely discussed in connection with Peter, the mythical guardian of the realm. In my reading, the forest of Neverwood functions as an important literary device in the story; it is at the same time the home of Pan, the fantastic guardian of the forest utopia who rebels against the corruption of the outside world, and a utopian refuge and a place of adventure for Wendy, John and Michael, who all help Peter to overcome the threat of Captain Hook. Thus the Neverwood in my reading draws heavily from the concept of the forest as utopia; it is a fantastic realm, a no-place, beyond our notions of time and space, where Peter Pan, a god-like figure, and his followers revolt against the corruption of the outside world and time itself. I also argue that Carl Jung's theories of the archetypes and of the collective unconscious help to establish and analyze the connections between Peter Pan and the older sylvan figures. In the analysis, textual evidence will be provided to support this mythical reading of *Peter and Wendy*, and the utopian aspects of the forest realm. However, this reading and interpretation of the novel and its forest motif are complemented by a short synopsis and a brief critical survey of some of the most prevailing critical interpretations of the story and of Peter Pan himself.

Freudian critics have in their readings of Barrie's novel emphasized two important dichotomies that seem to dominate the narrative; the conscious world

versus the unconscious, and youth versus adulthood. In these readings, the adventure begins as the Darling children leave the conscious world of Edwardian England and enter the unconscious world of the Neverland, which "they all recognized…at once", "not as something long dreamt of and seen at last, but as a familiar friend to whom they were returning home for the holidays" (*Peter Pan* 43). Thus in this Freudian reading the utopian Neverwood opposes the rational world of daily life. According to Barrie, the Neverland exists in the minds and dreams i.e. the unconscious of all children, but only children, though it varies a good deal:

> John's for instance, had a lagoon with flamingoes flying over it at which John was shooting, while Michael, who was very small, had a flamingo with lagoons flying over it. John lived in a boat turned upside down on the sands, Michael in a wigwam, Wendy in a house of leaves deftly sown together. (*Peter Pan* 7)

Consequently, many scholars have applied Freud's functional theory of the mind into their readings of the text, and analyzed the Neverland as a map of the child's mind or id, and consequently the adventures of the Darling children in this utopian land of the unconscious, where childish wishes are fulfilled, could be interpreted as dreams (Boulton 308, Egan 41). In this reading then, the Neverland becomes a place where the Freudian "reality principle" gives way to "pleasure principle", as it offers children an escape from the ordinary existence and repression of home into "a world apart, a world of one's own" (Boulton 309). Thus, in the Freudian sense, the utopian realm exists in each child's unconscious, where the rules and regulations of everyday life can be broken. It is a place of fairies, of pirates and Indians, and of altered laws of physics. Moreover, Barrie's proposition of the Neverland existing in children's minds and dreams interestingly parallels Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious; of "a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us" (Jung 4). This collective unconscious is made up of different archetypes, which appear repeatedly in literature. In *Peter and Wendy*, the archetypes of an earthly paradise, a utopia, and the eternal child are pivotal to the narrative. The Neverwood provides the Darling children a utopian escape from their mundane lives, and it is only accessible in the unconscious and through dreams. Peter Pan, on the other hand, epitomizes the Jungian concepts of the eternal child and of

the trickster, who like Robin Hood and the god Pan symbolizes our wistful yearning for the magic and excitement of youth, but also for rebellion and boundary breaking (Hallman 65). Both Peter and the Neverwood indeed exist in the collective unconscious as archetypes.

In the novel, the second important dichotomy, youth versus adulthood, is embodied in Peter's unyielding refusal to grow old, and in his rebellion against time, a struggle that in the Neverland manifests itself in Peter's war against Captain Hook. Peter is determined to vanquish Hook, his archenemy and counterforce, insisting that it must be he who defeats Hook (*Peter Pan* 47). The utopia presented in the novel is thus very much a children's utopia, providing Wendy, Michael and John an opportunity to escape from the adult world. Many Freudian scholars have observed that this almost obsessive fight between the eternal child and the adult man, could be interpreted as an Oedipal struggle of the son versus the father, a theory which as Nell Boulton observes is supported by Peter and Hook's competition over Wendy, the mother figure (311). Consequently, as Michael Egan observes, Peter and Hook could be seen as each other's sexual rivals (50). From this perspective, the climax of the novel comes when Peter, "youth and joy" (*Peter Pan* 158), finally conquers and overcomes the father, "a dark and sinister man" (*Peter Pan* 157).

Besides an Oedipal sun, some Freudian critics have seen Peter as "a charismatic figure who seems to typify the latency child's sense of certainty" (Boulton 309); in the Neverland, Peter as the leader of the Lost Boys is not only plagued by his constant self-conceit, lack of empathy and egoism, but he is also the only one to whom "make-believe and true were the same thing" (*Peter Pan* 70). Peter's rebellion against adulthood and maturity could thus also be argued to rise from his fear of the uncertainties that come with them.

The forest motif in *Peter and Wendy* can also be analyzed through Freudian and Jungian literary criticism. The home under the ground in which Peter, the Lost Boys and the Darling children reside and build their home, is situated in a forest, and provides a utopian setting for the narrative. Moreover, there is "a Never tree [that] tried hard to grow in the centre of the room, but every morning they sawed the trunk through, level with the floor" (*Peter Pan* 77). In Freudian and Jungian thinking, the subterranean home, the forest and the tree are all powerful symbols. Hallman, for

example, observes that the subterranean home resembling a cave is a universal mother symbol (71), whereas in Jungian theory the tree symbolizes "the vegetative, unconscious life, which will emerge again when human consciousness has been extinguished" (Jung 43). The forest, on the other hand, symbolizes both a place of transition and movement into a new life, and emphasizes the collective aspect instead of the personal (Jung 58, 262). From a Freudian perspective, the forest in *Peter and Wendy* abounds in sexual imagery; it is in the forest where Wendy assumes the role of the mother who tends to her children and household as the forest utopia of fantasy allows Wendy to leave her former identity as a child behind and to become something she perhaps dreams of becoming, but is not truly able to be yet; a mother and a wife (*Peter Pan* 74). Thus, the forest becomes a place of utopian wish-fulfillment and "make-believe", where Wendy's sexual desires can be realized safely in a no place outside time. The family life is sanitized from sex, as the eternal child Peter rebels against "the unpalatable realities of adult life" (Boulton 309), leaving Wendy able to fulfill her wishes and imitate the role of the mother and the wife without having to enter the adult world in a truly physical sense. As Ralph Hallman observes, Peter and Wendy's symbolic sexual union is further emphasized by the Never tree that grows in the subterranean home, as it is a Jungian archetype symbolizing motherhood and unconscious feminine impulses (68).

Some scholars, on the other hand, have tried to analyze the story as a product of certain socio-historical conditions and ideologies. Heather Springer, for example, argues that there is a connection between the novel and the Boer War (1899-1902), and that the novel, or rather the play that was first published in 1904, was written to be "a model for the courage and cleverness needed to win a war representing the sanctity of the homeland" (96). Springer continues and states that biographical information of J.M Barrie supports the argument that the author was inspired by "the country's renewed emphasis on courage and service" and that the novel could be read as "a turn-of-the-century articulation of the patriotic act, allowing recently returned soldiers to be received home as heroes" (98). Consequently, the Neverwood could be read as a utopia that provides the Darling children with an opportunity to adopt and prepare for the roles of the courageous British soldier and the Imperial mother. Like Robin Hood and his companions, Peter and the Darling children abide in the utopian forest from whence they commence their attacks against the pirates

that threaten the peace, and where they act out the idyllic British domestic life. In this reading, Barrie's ideals of bravery and masculinity are best epitomized by Peter and Hook's strive for "good form"; the pirates' nocturnal invasion into the forest and the capture of the children in the cover of the night, a manoeuvre designed by Hook, clearly indicates "bad form" and dishonest conduct, as Hook in the act violates the traditions of warfare (*Peter Pan* 123). Springer argues that Barrie utilized this dichotomy of "good form" and "bad form" as a symbolical critique of the Boer guerilla tactics and methods, and advocates the need to aspire to higher ideals (97). Consequently, Peter takes on the role of the warrior who fights for higher ideals and strives for "good form", as evident in his unwillingness to attack a sleeping pirate, as that would be against the proper code of conduct (*Peter Pan* 45). As Peter and Hook engage in a sword duel in chapter eight, Peter again shows "good form" as he acknowledges that he has an unfair advantage over Hook who is standing below him, and offers his hand to Hook. Peter, however, is left bewildered when the opponent does not adhere to the same idealized notion of fairness, as Hook cowardly bites Peter after he has shown fairness:

> Not the pain of this but its unfairness was what dazed Peter. It made him quite helpless. He could only stare, horrified. Every child is affected thus the first time he is treated unfairly. All he thinks he has a right to when he comes to you to be yours is fairness. After you have been unfair to him he will love you again, but will never afterwards be quite the same boy. (*Peter Pan* 97)

In this reading, Hook's unfair actions, representing the shameless and dishonorable tactics that had entered the battle field at the turn of the 20$^{th}$-century, are lamented by Barrie who is attempting to revive higher ideals, as epitomized in Peter.

In this historical reading, the utopian forest of Neverwood at the same time provides a home and a refuge for British soldiers and their mothers, and forms a military base for them. Like the ancient Celts and Robin Hood and his Merry Men, Peter and the Lost Boys attack from the forest and then retreat to its shadows and safety. The home underground in the Neverwood also symbolizes a place of peace and recovery after battles and adventures, where the mother takes care of her boys and soldiers. Thus, the utopia provides Wendy with a chance to assume the role of the caring mother who looks after her courageous sons. Springer also notes that

Wendy "provides the civilizing influence boys will need to become men" (97). Consequently, at the end of the novel, as Wendy and the boys are held captive on the pirate ship, Wendy as the imperial proud mother takes on the voice of the very Empire itself and states: "We hope our sons will die like English gentlemen" (*Peter Pan* 146), encouraging and instructing the boys to remain loyal to the Empire till the very end.

Evidently, the interpretations presented above, which are but few of many, have approached the text from different perspectives. The Neverwood has provided utopias for girls practicing motherhood and femininity, for boys preparing for military service and for children escaping the constraints of contemporary society and the corruption of maturity. In my reading, however, the focus will now shift to the mythical aspects of Peter's character, to his relation to earlier sylvan figures, and to the purely utopian aspects of the forest motif.

### 3.2.2 The Neverwood

In my reading, the forest of Neverwood constitutes a pivotal part of Barrie's utopian project; the Neverland. The Neverwood represents an alternative society, which harkens back to rural Arcadia and to the Greenwood society of Robin Hood and his Merry Men. Furthermore, Peter Pan, the leader and animator of this sylvan realm, comes across as a figure from classical mythology and other ancient religions, whose appearance and nature abounds in allusions to older pagan deities and woodland spirits. As a sylvan figure, he rules over and guards the Neverwood, just like Robin rules over his utopian forest. From Neverwood, Peter, a virile and eternally youthful spirit, wages his war against time, modernity and corruption. Both Peter, the hero-child, and his sylvan realm, an earthly paradise, represent Barrie's revisions of the archetypal motifs present also in Virgil's Eclogues and in the stories of Robin Hood. Naturally, Barrie's narrative reworks many of the legends and tropes associated with the archetypes, but as Humphrey Carpenter concludes, "Peter Pan is an alternative religion" (181).

As the novel arguably deals with religious and spiritual archetypes and motifs, and proposes an alternative religion, it is useful to point to the parallels between Barrie's notion of the god-like Peter and his utopia existing in the minds and dreams

of all children, and Carl Jung's idea of the collective unconscious, which consists of different archetypes. According to Jung, the age-old myths and legends, like that of an earthly paradise, which survive in our collective unconscious through generations reflect certain primordial archetypes or primal images (Jung 72). Thus, Barrie's alternative religion makes us of this Jungian idea of archetypes and images, as both Peter and the utopia exist in the minds and dreams, or the unconscious of children:

> Doctors sometimes draw maps of other parts of you, and your own map can become intensely interesting, but catch them trying to draw a map of a child's mind, which is not only confused but keeps going round all the time. There are zig-zag lines on it, just like your temperature on a card, and there are probably roads in the island, for the Neverland is always more or less like an island, with astonishing splashes of colour here and there, and coral reefs and rakish-looking craft in the offing, and savages and lonely lairs, and gnomes who are mostly tailors. (*Peter Pan* 7)

> Occasionally in her travels through her children's minds Mrs Darling found things she could not understand, and of these quite the most perplexing was the word Peter. She knew of no Peter, and yet he was here and there in John and Michael's minds, while Wendy's began to be scrawled all over him. The name stood out in bolder letters than any of the other words, and as Mrs Darling gazed she felt that it had an oddly cocky appearance. (*Peter Pan* 9).

This archetypal utopian society exists in the minds of children, and is thus "beyond the reach of adults, remaining concealed and elusive, it may well be said that it does not exist, or at least that it is a non-place. But a non-place is precisely the translation of the etymology of utopia" (Tomoiaga 237). Moreover, the character of Peter also appears as an archetypal god-like spirit, reminiscent of the Greek Pan, the English Robin Hood and the Green Man, or even of Jesus Christ. In my reading, the focus will be on the pagan characteristics of Peter, but Humphrey Carpenter, for example, sees Peter Pan as Christ-like, half human half immortal, as he accompanies the Darling children "on a journey through the skies to his own heavenly land" (182). In my reading, however, this duality in Peter's character does not suggest a connection to the Christian God, but rather to the Greek Pan, the Lord of the Wild, who sometimes benevolent, sometimes not, is half man, half animal (Graves 62). Peter

Pan's connection to this Arcadian deity is further emphasized in one of Barrie's earlier versions of the story, *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (1906), where Peter is described as "only half human" (15), and of course in *Peter and Wendy*, Peter's ability to fly, to converse with fairies and his peculiar conception of time suggest a supernatural element to his person. Moreover, the Greek deity's "love of riot" (Graves 62) is reflected in Peter Pan who appears at times benevolent and protective, other times malignant and destructive. Peter's roguish nature is aptly described by Barrie:

> He would come down laughing over something fearfully funny he had been saying to a star, but he had already forgotten what it was, or he would come up with mermaid scales still sticking to him, and yet not be able to say for certain what had been happening. (*Peter Pan* 42)

The passage not only describes Peter's roguishness, but also his non-human perception of time and place. Peter Pan's "love of riot" manifests itself naturally also in his constant quarrels and fights against the pirates and Captain Hook.

Pan's Arcadia, Robin's Greenwood and Peter Pan's Neverwood are all alternative societies that exist alongside the human world. Throughout the literary history of the British Isles, this notion of a world beyond ours recurs, appearing in the Celtic mythology as the Otherworld, and later in medieval folklore as the kingdom of various woodland spirits, such as Herne, Woden and the Green Man (Kavey 75). In *Peter and Wendy*, this utopian "no place", essentially out of reach for anyone save those that Peter and the utopia deem worthy (*Peter Pan* 43), represents vitality, youth and magic, and it stands in opposition to Victorian London, which in turn symbolizes the status-quo and maturity (Yeoman 102-103). Peter's utopia, like that of Robin Hood, thus provides a retreat for those escaping the oppression and corruption of the human world.

A yearning to break away from the constraints of ordinary existence and return to a state of harmony and magic found in woodland spaces, or in nature in general, seems to be an archetypal motif in Western, and indeed British literature (Robert Harrison 155). The Darling children retreat to this utopian realm where they can live and prosper under the guidance of Peter Pan, free from the physical and temporal

restrictions of mundane life. Barrie's forest utopia provides children with an escape from time and linearity, and presents them with an opportunity to live carelessly and heartlessly forever. Wendy, Michael and John adopt and try out new identities, all of which are possible only in this utopian realm. Furthermore, the forest utopia, like Rousseau in his musings of the ideal state of man, champions a return to nature; to effectively live as noble savages. The renaturalizing effect of the forest on the Darling children is evident, as they soon begin to forget their earlier lives in the outside world (*Peter Pan* 79-80), and instead become accustomed to their new life in the home under the ground. Moreover, the Lost Boys who have lived in Pan's utopia longer than the Darling children, "wear the skins of bears slain by themselves" (52), and Slightly, a Lost Boy, "cuts whistles out of the trees and dances ecstatically to his own tunes" (53). The Lost Boys have integrated into nature. Moreover, according to Barrie, Peter and his followers are "the wild things of the woods" (57). The concept of returning to nature connects Barrie's story with *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, where the Greenwood society of Robin provides an alternative to the king's world that lies outside the woodland realm; in Robin's realm humans exist peacefully with nature, combining the best of both human and non-human worlds. Besides ruling over their forest realms, both Peter and Robin actively take part in revolting against the outside world; Robin opposes the strict, and often unjust laws of medieval England, whereas Peter rebels against time, and even modernity in the sense that he represents a return to virility, to carelessness, and in my reading, to paganism.

Peter Pan's connections to pagan lore and imagery abound. According to Allison Kavey, the horned god Pan, a figure of Greek mythology and likely an important influence on Peter Pan, was "a half-man and half-goat, known for lusting after women, playing the pipes and serving as the god of shepherds and herders", whilst also harboring a deeply self-conceited view of himself (76). All these characteristics can be applied to Peter Pan. Peter is neither a man nor an animal, but something in between; a creature of both worlds. His perpetually boyish figure and his ability to fly like a bird are but some of the features of Peter that distinguish him from humanity. In *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, Barrie even makes allusions to goats, an animal that is closely associated with the horned Pan in Greek mythology and with Thor in Norse folklore; in the novel, Peter is said to ride on a goat, often playing his pipes at the same time (19, 120). The motif of pipe playing, again

suggesting a link to the Greek mythos, appears also in *Peter and Wendy* as Peter seductively plays his pipes to Wendy while she sleeps. Similarly, the Greek Pan was also thought to appear to people through dreams (Varner 100-104). In my reading, this trope indicates Peters luring children to enter his utopian realm by playing them beautiful pipe music in their dreams, or in their unconscious (*Peter Pan* 9). Peter's tempting of children to come with him is further characterized by his ability to take on a "voice that no woman has ever yet been able to resist" (27). Thus, Peter Pan, though sanitized from sex to a great extent, certainly "lusts" after women, as he tempts Wendy and many women before and after her to come with him to his realm. Furthermore, Peter's relation to fairies, other supernatural creatures and his guardianship of animals even more strongly connect him to the Greek Pan, who was known as the protector of all wild creatures (Varner 101); Peter is "said to live with fairies" (8), and of course his closest companion, Tinker Bell, indeed belongs to this Arcadian race. Peter also commands the respect of the mermaids, and is admired by the Never bird, whose nest Peter salvages in chapter 9 (*Peter Pan* 103).

The paganism of Peter Pan does not end with his similarities to the horned god of Greek legend. In addition, Barrie seems to be drawing from a much more local British sylvan lore, namely the May Day tradition and the legend of the Green Man in his depiction of Peter Pan and his forest abode. The character of Peter, "a lovely boy, clad in skeleton leaves and the juices that ooze out of trees" (*Peter Pan* 11) appears as a figure that embodies the forest itself. Peter's appearance of course closely resembles that of Robin Hood, another sylvan figure, whose "colour is of green" (Waltz 340), and who dwells beneath a greenwood tree. Peter's home under the ground entered through trees, on the other hand, is another symbol of British pagan lore; in the Celtic tradition, trees often marked the entrance to the underworld (Varner 65). Thus, Peter as the divine animator of the forest utopia resides in a godly world below. The usage and repetition of the colour green in clothing and in narration, important to both Peter and Robin, is traditionally associated with the pagan May Day tradition in Britain (Varner 77); a festival held in celebration of the powers of tree spirits and of spring. Thus, trees and rebirth are pivotal in the descriptions of the utopias in which these two characters dwell. The repetition and emphasis of the greenwood motif in *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, and the peculiar Never tree that grows in the middle of Peter Pan's forest abode further tie the characters to

the tree worship tradition. The trees in both stories function as *axis mundi*, centers of the world around which the narratives are built; Peter's home under the ground and the Never tree function as the focal point in Barrie's story, just as the greenwood tree does for Robin. Such world trees are also found across European pagan lore, *Yggdrasil*, *Irminsul* and the Celtic oak being some of the most prominent examples. This mythical reading, and the parallels to the May Day tradition, of the character of Peter Pan also provides an interesting alternative interpretation of the relationship between Peter and Wendy; traditionally during the festivities a May King and a May Queen were chosen for their beauty and youth (Varner 78). In this mythic reading, Peter thus represents the eternally youthful May King and Wendy the May Queen, and their symbolic marriage in the novel thus functions as a pivotal part in the May Day tradition. The following year, and indeed every year till eternity, Peter returns to the human world to search for a new queen (*Peter Pan* 185). The repetition of the spring motif, central to the May Day tradition, is apparent in both *Peter and Wendy* and in *A Gest of Robyn Hode*. Robert Waltz observes that Robin returns to his forest from his adventures in spring, to the tune of singing birds, thus if accepting his mythical connection to the May Day tradition, he signals the coming of summer (292). Similarly, Peter returns to Wendy, and later for other children every spring, in order to take her back to the utopia (*Peter Pan* 181). This eternal return is a common feature in many pagan traditions, and relates to the cyclical notion of time.

The theme of rebirth, associated with the May Day festivities, connects Peter Pan to Robin Hood and to British pagan past. The very utopias these sylvan figures rule essentially cease to exist, or at least hibernate, as the animating spirits leave them. Barrie describes this phenomenon:

> In his absence things are usually quiet on the island. The fairies take an hour longer in the morning, the beasts attend to their young, the redskins feed heavily for six days and nights, and when the pirates and lost boys meet they merely bite their thumbs at each other. But with the coming of Peter, who hates lethargy, they are under way again. (*Peter Pan* 51)

The utopia comes to life, or is rejuvenated with the return of Peter Pan, the animating spirit. Similarly, as Robin Hood leaves his forest, his court under the greenwood tree dissolves around the woods, yet becomes reinvigorated at the very instant of his

return (Waltz 56). This motif of rebirth ties both Peter and Robin to the May Day tradition, as they both, in my reading, possess features that imply a relation to the pagan fertility cult, bringing life and vitality with them to their realms. Peter's ability to give life to things is repeated as he metaphorically gives life to Wendy after she has been shot with an arrow. Wendy's life is saved by the gift of Pan, an acorn button, which blocked the arrow (*Peter Pan* 68). In addition to animating the utopia, Peter Pan also maintains it; as his utopia is only for those uncorrupted by time, the very reason he must do away with Hook, as some of his followers grow too old, Peter "thins them out" to retain the untaintedness (*Peter Pan* 52).

To signal their return to the forest, both Peter and Robin emit a special sound; Peter crows while Robin blows his horn (*Peter Pan* 66, *The Gest of Robyn Hode* 55). Their followers, the Lost Boys and the Merry Men, instantly recognize the sound and prepare for the return of their leaders. Additionally, especially in the case of Peter, whose comings and goings create a cycle of death and rebirth to the Neverland and the Neverwood, a further connection to Dionysus, the curator of nature, and Pan, the Lord of the Wild, is apparent (Varner 99). The cyclical nature of Peter Pan, who revolts against the linear time conception that forces men and women to grow up by choosing to remain forever as a boy, thus echoes the spirit of the Green Man, who according to Gary Varner is "an embodiment of the heart and soul of the mystery of nature, the cyclical character of life and death" (7). Thus, in addition to Peter refusing to be affected by time, the cyclical worldview is exhibited also as Peter faces imminent death; "he was standing erect on the rock…, with that smile on his face and a drum beating within him. It was saying, 'To die will be an awfully big adventure'" (*Peter Pan* 99). For Peter, death is not the end.

But just as the utopias of Peter Pan and Robin Hood cannot exist without them, neither can the leaders exist without their realms. Peter's Neverwood and Robin's Greenwood are both utopian projects that oppose the world outside by establishing an alternative society. Thus, as the characters leave the very utopia that they essentially embody and animate, they become weak and powerless, disconnected from their power. Their return to their respective utopias thus not only sparks the realms to life, but also gives life to the animators themselves. As Peter returns from the outside world, where his body and shadow become separated, and to which he

clearly does not belong, “his careless manner [was] gone at last, his eyes were sparkling, and a tingle went through [the Darling children] every time they touched his body (*Peter Pan* 44). Peter’s virility and potency are restored as he returns to his own world. Similarly, as Robin returns from his travels, weary and downcast, he finds strength and joy in his Greenwood, and becomes himself again (Waltz 55).

As a utopian realm inspired by Virgil’s Arcadia and Robin’s Greenwood, the forest of Neverwood represents a place of simplicity, rejuvenation and magic. Like the nymphs in ancient Arcadia, the fairies in *Peter and Wendy* have orgies in the forest, which together with Peter’s seduction of children with his pipes challenges the idea that Barrie’s novel is completely sanitized from sex (*Peter Pan* 75). This fairy trope also establishes a stronger connection to the Celtic fairy lore, already discussed with the notion of the Otherworld. Barrie, however, goes even further with this allusion to Celtic mythology, as the name of chapter 3 “Come away, come away!”, is a clear reference to William Butler Yeats’ poem “The Stolen Child”, which itself is based on Irish legends of fairies beguiling children to come with them. Thus, Peter’s tempting of the Darling children to accompany him to the utopia can be said to draw from to distinct pagan traditions; the Greek and the Celtic. The forest utopia itself provides the children with an opportunity to be careless and heartless by escaping the conscious human world, to take part in adventures and encounter supernatural beings, but also to rest between their exploits.

## *3.3 The Hobbit, or There and Back Again*

### 3.3.1 A Critical Survey

Over the last 70 years, J.R.R. Tolkien’s Middle Earth, a fictional world full of fantastical creatures, heroes and adventures, has captivated the minds and sparked the imaginations of children and adults alike. A possible explanation to the perennial interest in this literary world lies in the thorough, diligent and ambitious effort that Tolkien himself put in to create a world that seemed truly real; not a fictitious world that would from the beginning appear as make-belief and unrealistic, but a world surrounded with more than a tinge of nostalgia, a world that perhaps once was. Tolkien’s personal and scholarly interest in the Anglo-Saxon literature and culture, and in the Finnish and Finno-Ugric languages, together with his urge to create a kind

of mythological national epic for England, similar to Finland's *Kalevala* (1835), all helped him to create not just a good fantasy novel, but a kind of folklore that takes place in a world that feels alive and real.

Tolkien's mythos consists of works of different foci and of different target audiences; whilst *Silmarillion* (1977), a novel that lays down the creation myth of Middle Earth, its first inhabitants and the different deities, is aimed at a more mature audience, *The Lord of The Rings* (1954-55) contains elements of both children's and adults' stories. *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* (1937), however, is most clearly aimed at children, though the events depicted in the novel are part of a larger narrative worked on by Tolkien throughout his other novels. *The Hobbit*, essentially a traditional monomyth, tells the story of Bilbo Baggins, who embarks on an adventure with Gandalf the wizard and thirteen dwarves, led by Thorin Oakenshield, on a quest to reclaim a lost dwarf kingdom. Though the company encounters many difficulties and adversaries during their quest, in this section, special attention will be paid to the forest of Mirkwood, an enchanted twilight wood, through which the company has to travel in order to advance in their quest, and to its magical and otherworldly inhabitants, the Wood-Elves.

Looking at the historical context in which *The Hobbit* was written, and acknowledging the biography of the author, provides interesting readings of the narrative. Tolkien, himself a veteran of the First World War, started writing *The Hobbit* during the interwar years. His own experiences in the trenches of the horrors of the Great War, contrasted with his great fondness for the English rural countryside clearly played a role in his creation of the race of hobbits, a people of "gardens, trees and unmechanized farmlands" (Carpenter 179). Indeed, though himself a strong opponent of allegory (*Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 145), one can in the character of Bilbo see a peace-loving Englishman, like Tolkien, torn away from the quiet and solace of his own house and his study into a dangerous and possibly fatal adventure, during which this rustic country dweller is forced by the outside world to become something different altogether; at the end, Bilbo "was a very different hobbit from the one that had run out without a pocket-handkerchief from Bag-End long ago" (*The Hobbit* 201). The adventure always changes those who dare to embark upon it.

The transformation of the main protagonist, Bilbo, is at the centre of the Mirkwood passage in *The Hobbit*; Bilbo has to develop sides of himself that have previously never had the opportunity to mature to save himself and the dwarves from the deadly menace of the giant spiders, and later from the captivity of the Elvenking. The forest, surely like the battlefields of France, is surrounded by a sense of uncertainty, gloom and even the threat of physical violence; the company wanders through the pathways of the twilight forest, trying not to lose hope and orientation. The darkness and the vastness, however, soon creep up on them, and the company succumbs to a feeling of hopelessness that is echoed by Thorin: "Is there no end to this accursed forest?" (138). The giant spiders encountered by the company symbolize Bilbo's first true battle, and like a soldier who has experienced a baptism of fire, Bilbo emerges a more courageous hobbit after the ordeal, and the dwarves begin to respect and listen to Bilbo's counsel, as they "had changed their opinion of Mr Baggins very much" (156). After the battle, one more adversity awaits the party in the forest; imprisonment. The Wood-Elves capture the dwarves and put them in gaol, thus forcing Bilbo, now braver after his triumphant victory over the spiders, to free them. Consequently, in the twilight of the forest, Bilbo simultaneously becomes more courageous, more adventurous, and more Tookish, being inspired by the adventurous Took side of the family, but loses some of his former decency and respectability; whilst saving his friends and thus showing his loyalty to them, he sneaks, eavesdrops and acts against the rule of the Elvenking in the forest. Much like war, the forest, and perhaps the One Ring with its slowly corrupting influence, forces Bilbo to transform himself, even if it means breaking out of former moral codes and behavioural patterns. Though never losing his love of the Shire and the pastoral ideal of rural country living, Bilbo has become a different, more complex individual.

Tolkien's avid interest in Norse and Germanic folklore as well as his own academic expertise in Old English literature are clearly evident in *The Hobbit*, and tracking down these influences provides interesting readings of the novel. On the surface level, the names of many of the main characters indicate that Tolkien is drawing inspiration from old European poetic and folk traditions; Gandalf and all the names of the thirteen dwarves are taken from a Norse poem "Dvergatal", which is a part of the story "Voluspá", itself a part of the *Poetic Edda*, written down during the 13$^{th}$ century (Johnson 5). Gandalf, however appears in Tolkien's mythos not as a

dwarf, but as a wizard, embodying the characteristics of the wise old Odin, or Woden in Anglo-Saxon lore. Beorn, on the other hand, is an Anglo-Saxon term for "chieftain", but also closely resembles the Swedish and Norwegian word for "bear", undoubtedly by design (6). Even the name of the dragon, Smaug, is derived from a Norse verb denoting "to creep" (6). It is then no wonder that the name of the forest of Mirkwood draws from the same etymological sources; in Old Norse, "myrkr viðr" means "a dark forest" (3).

Dwarves, elves and other supernatural beings, like dragons and giant spiders are also part of the Nordic and Germanic mythos, and the central quest in *The Hobbit*, namely the slaying of the dragon, directly harkens back to the story of Fafnir, found in the Icelandic Volsunga saga, written down in the late 13th century. One can also speculate on the importance and relation of the symbol of the ring that represents a cyclical notion of time, and of the seasonal cycle, which are both important in the European pagan tradition (Dowden 129, Lindow 336, Varner 122). Following this notion, Steve Walker points out that "seasonal rhythm is…vital in *The Hobbit*", whose "plot traces a life cycle, initiating Bilbo's adventure in spring, confronting threats to life in autumn" (59). Tolkien deliberately makes a distinction between the symbolism surrounding each season; spring is a time of joy, flowers and beautiful fragrances (*The Hobbit* 162, 248), and it is in spring when the company begin and end their quest. In summer, the company arrives at Rivendell and partake in Midsummer festivities of dancing and singing. Rivendell, the Last Homely House, thus is associated with joy and laughter, but the departure symbolizes the turn of the wheel; as summer slowly turns to autumn, so does laughter and merry-making make way for coldness and uncertainty. As the company approaches Mirkwood, there "was an autumn-like mist white upon the ground and the air was chill" (126). In the forest, the falling leaves remind the company of this seasonal change (136). Winter, then, symbolizes the climax of the adventure; the return of the dwarves to their ancestral home in the Lonely Mountain, the return of the King Under the Mountain, the death of Smaug and the Battle of the Five Armies. Winter, a time of death, is represented not only by the death of the dragon but also by Thorin's decease. However, as spring comes, a symbol of rebirth, the world once again takes on a more joyful appearance.

The forest of Mirkwood, despite the etymological roots of its name, is a colourful mixture of various tropes, creatures and themes from European folklore. Just like in the old Celtic story of "Cad Coddeau", the forest of Mirkwood appears to be sentient: "Soon the light at the gate was like a little bright hole far behind, and the quiet was so deep that their feet seemed to thump along while all the trees leaned over them and listened" (*The Hobbit* 131). The singing elves, who are making merry in the forest also harken back to Celtic notions of the Fairy people and sacred groves: "There was a fire in their midst and there were torches fastened to some of the trees round about; but most splendid sight of all: they were eating and drinking and laughing merrily" (*The Hobbit* 142). For the Wood elves, the forest functions as a sanctuary, a green cathedral. Beside the Celtic influences, Mirkwood abounds in other pagan and mythic imagery; the company hears the sound of a hunt proceeding in the forest; "they became aware of the dim blowing of horns in the wood and the sound as of dogs baying far off. Then they all fell silent; and as they sat it seemed they could hear the noise of a great hunt going by to the north of the path, though they saw no sign of it" (*The Hobbit* 136). This passage evokes images of the Wild Hunt, a phenomenon related to Germanic and Anglo-Saxon paganism in which Odin or Woden leads a party of men through the countryside and forests (Anderson 77). In addition to the echoes of Norse, Germanic and Celtic paganism in Tolkien's forest narrative, there are clear signs of Greek influence. One of the most obvious parallels is found in the enchanted river that flows through Mirkwood; Beorn, an ambiguous shape shifter, primarily a benevolent host but also subject to periods of animal violence when he is to be feared, provides lodgings for the company before they enter Mirkwood. He warns the party of a strange stream that flows there. He tells them of a river, "black and strong which crosses the path. That you should neither drink of, nor bathe in; for I have heard that it carries enchantment and a great drowsiness and forgetfulness" (*The Hobbit* 124). Such a river is found also in Greek mythology; river Lethe flows in the Underworld, causing forgetfulness to anyone who drinks from it (Post 80). Thus, when Bombur, one of the dwarves, falls into the river he effectively loses his memory.

Some scholars have noted that the Mirkwood narrative draws inspiration also from the Homeric mythos. Tolkien, whose expertise in Old English and Anglo-Saxon

literature, and Germanic culture in general, is well established,[1] was not unfamiliar with themes and tropes drawn from classical literature either. As Hamish Williams argues (188), the journey of Bilbo and the thirteen dwarves into Mirkwood parallels that of Odysseus and his men into the island of Aiaia, where they too have to traverse through a forest that is inhabited by supernatural beings. Williams points out that in both narratives a deer appears and meets the party before it is killed, and both protagonists, Bilbo and Odysseus, have to climb above the trees in order to gain a vantage (188). In both stories, the parties are lured off the path by the inhabitants of the forests; in *The Hobbit,* the dwarves and Bilbo are lured off by the lights and the merry-making of the elves, whereas in *The Odyssey* it is singing that tempts the men off the track (188). The last parallel concerns the method of rescue; both Bilbo and Odysseus require the help of a magic item. Bilbo, with the help of his ring of power, is able to save the dwarves from the Elvenking's court, just as Odysseus is given a magical herb by Hermes to aid him (189).

Thus, *The Hobbit* and the forest of Mirkwood can be read both as an allegory of the First World War or as a mythical narrative that combines elements of many European pagan traditions and folklores. In my reading, I will focus on the otherworldly aspects of Mirkwood; like the forest in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Mirkwood appears to be a timeless, mysterious and even nostalgic place. Both forests seem to tap into mankind's unconscious, if not imaginary, memory of what once was; they are places of magic, of elves and fairies, and of transformations. They are neither evil nor good as these forests symbolize the twilight: the stage between good and evil, night and day, and human and non-human. I will also discuss the similarities and differences of the forest inhabitants in Tolkien and Shakespeare's works.

### 3.3.2 Mirkwood

The word 'Mirkwood', literally 'dark wood' would suggest a place of danger, terror and challenge. However, in my reading the forest of Mirkwood represents a topos that transcends the previously discussed dichotomies of good and evil: it is

[1] J.R.R. Tolkien served as the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon and Fellow of Pembroke College, Oxford, from 1925 to 1945 and Merton Professor of English Language and Literature and Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, from 1945 to 1959

neither a place of pure wilderness like the Wild Wood in *The Wind in the Willows* nor a utopian ideal like the Neverwood in *Peter and Wendy*. Tolkien's Mirkwood is a forest of nostalgia, a place of liminality; it is a symbol for that which we cannot fully understand and comprehend, for something that is unfamiliar to us, rather than something that is inherently hostile toward those who enter it. Robert Harrison describes this notion of the nostalgic forest as being "at once a temple of living pillars and a scene of horror, an enchanted wood and a wood of abandon" (183). Mirkwood conceals within itself an otherworldly and magnificent "elven" kingdom, but in order to reach it, the visitor has to pass through a twilight woodland. In this reading, Mirkwood, although drawing heavily from Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic lore and symbolism, is also to a large extent comparable with Shakespeare's fairy forest in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Not only are these two literary forests inhabited by otherworldly dwellers, fairies and elves, who traditionally live in "wild, uncanny and magical places…within 'middle-earth'" (MacDonald 166), but the sylvan narratives make use of many of the same tropes, motifs and symbols. Moreover, and perhaps most interestingly, both forests could be seen to represent, or comment on, tradition and memory; the authors ascribe certain features and qualities to primordial twilight forests in contrast to the world outside. In this reading, the forests of twilight as liminal topoi symbolize the memories of lost traditions (Harrison 155) and archetypes that exist in the unconscious, which in time have become unfamiliar and strange to those who have abandoned the primordial forest. Thus, the sylvan inhabitants of Mirkwood and the Fairy forest represent the authors' ideas of mankind's primordial sylvan past.

As stated earlier, throughout Western literary history, mankind has perpetually been portrayed as *homines silvestres*, born of forests. Consequently, protagonists have moved from wilderness i.e. the forests into civilization, often bringing elements of nature with them into civil society, as is the case with Romulus and Finn Mac Cumhaill. The forest symbolizes the primordial home of man, which in time he abandons, and perhaps even forgets. An aura of mystery and uncanniness then gradually starts to surround the forest as a topos, a trend that is also evident in later Western literature (Harrison 155). In Tolkien's imaginative mythos, it is the race of elves that mostly inhabit these primordial spaces, which seem to exist outside time. Tolkien's elves, practically immortal, thus function not only as mysterious dwellers

of the twilight forest, but also as keepers of tradition, as symbols of the past; they still exist in and according to the primordial state of man, that is, the Wood elves are in accordance with their name, "of the forest". Thus, as the twilight forest in this reading symbolizes memory and that which once was, the elves in Tolkien's sylvan lore appear as symbols of the mythical primordial state of man. Moreover, by comparing Tolkien's elves and Shakespeare's fairies, both of whom reside in a similar liminal topos, one can draw interesting conclusions on the authors' respective notions of the past.

As Robert Harrison argues, "forests have the psychological effect of evoking memories of the past; indeed, that they become figures for memory itself. They are enveloped, as it were, in the aura of lost origins" (156). This element of the twilight forest, namely the ability to re-awaken lost memories, and identities, can be further discussed through Freud's concept of the uncanny. In this reading, Mirkwood, an otherworldly place unfamiliar and strange to any visitors who enter, transcends the dichotomy of good and evil. Like Shakespeare's sylvan space in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* the more appropriate dichotomy is familiarity and strangeness. The concept of the uncanny refers to something frightening or unsettling that was once well known and had been long familiar (Trigg 46). To the Wood elves of Tolkien and to the fairies of Shakespeare, the otherworldly forests appear as the world that is; it is the primordial twilight forest in which they dwell and which they call home. However, to Bilbo and the dwarves, and to the Athenians and the actors in Shakespeare's play, who come from the world outside, Mirkwood and the fairy forest are places of strangeness and unfamiliarity; Mirkwood is indeed a forest of an "enormous uncanny darkness" (*The Hobbit* 133). The forest, and its inhabitants, thus represents the unknown, the Other. Unlike the forest as wilderness, also a place of unfamiliarity, the forest as twilight penetrates the unconscious of those who enter; it is a place once familiar. Consequently, the forest as twilight affects those who enter on a deep psychological level, bringing forth memories and identities thus far hidden; Bilbo indeed finds his courage, his Tookish side, in the forest. At the beginning of the journey, as Bilbo hears a captivating song of adventure and of great deeds, he feels "something Tookish" waking deep inside him, and "he wished to go and see the great mountains, and hear the pine-trees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves, and wear a sword instead of a walking-stick" (15). The blood and ancestral memories

that flow in his veins, and the capabilities that lie dormant in his unconscious, re-awaken during the adventure in the uncanny Mirkwood. In the forest, Bilbo's spiritual transformation fully begins as he encounters and defeats enormous magical beasts:

> The spider lay dead beside him, and his sword-blade was stained black. Somehow the killing of the giant spider, all alone by himself in the dark without the help of the wizard or the dwarves or of anyone else, made a great difference to Mr Baggins. He felt a different person, and much fiercer and bolder… (*The Hobbit* 146)

Bilbo begins to adopt the identity envisioned for him by Gandalf at the beginning of the adventure. In Mirkwood, Bilbo rescues the dwarves from the spiders, infiltrates the fortress of the Elvenking and eventually frees the dwarves again from the captivity of the elves. Thus, in the forest Bilbo becomes that which Gandalf the wizard prophesied. Bilbo's transformation in the forest, however, is not only spiritual but also physical as he with the help of the magic ring is capable of making himself invisible; in the forest as twilight, the boundaries between the observable and the unobservable evidently become unclear. The fairy forest of Shakespeare is likewise a place not just of spiritual and mental but also physical transformation. The four lovers who enter the sylvan topos are in love, fall in love and fall out of love while they are under the influence of the twilight forest and its spells. Furthermore, Demetrius, a proud Athenian, like the proud Thorin learns humility during his visit to the forest, and accepts the error of his former ways (IV.i.160-175). The transformation of Bottom into an ass, on the other hand, deals with the physical aspect of metamorphosis, alluding to the Classical notion of the great chain of being: man lies midway between the angels and the beasts and has the potential for both "angelic" and "bestial" behaviour (III.i.85-105). The twilight forest, then, resembles the wild forest in that it is a place of transformation. It could be argued, however, that Mirkwood provides a different kind of testing ground for Bilbo than the Wild Wood does for Mole; while Mole enters the terrifying wild forest alone and momentarily succumbs to it, Mirkwood manages to awaken the hero in Bilbo by forcing him to become that which he is destined to be. Certainly, Mole's transformation begins in the forest, but it is completed much later in the story, whereas Bilbo becomes utterly

transformed early on when entering Mirkwood: effectively, the company would have been unable to pass through the forest without Bilbo's metamorphosis.

The concept of the uncanny, of something that is strange and even frightful due to unfamiliarity, connects Tolkien and Shakespeare's twilight forests. The ancient forest of Mirkwood seems mysterious: there are "queer noises…grunts, scufflings, and hurryings in the undergrowth" (*The Hobbit* 132), the company is constantly surrounded by an uncanny darkness, and even the wind has a sad sound (*The Hobbit* 137). This mystification of the forest emphasizes the strangeness and otherworldliness of the topos, but also highlights the unexplainable terror felt by the company in a place that is no more familiar to them. Although Mirkwood and the Fairy forest are both characterized by strangeness and mystery, it must be noted that terror and fear, "the wilderness", which are represented, for example, by the giant spiders, are much more present in Mirkwood than in Shakespeare's woodland space. Still, both forests transcend the categories of wilderness and utopia, and instead fall into the category of twilight.

An otherworldly air lingers in the liminal space of Mirkwood, and the narrator observes that "there was no movement of air down under the forest roof, and it was everlastingly still and dark and stuffy" (132). The otherworldliness of Mirkwood's darkness becomes apparent when Tolkien states that even the dwarves, a subterranean race, "who were used to tunneling, and lived at times for long whiles without the light of the sun" felt unnerved by it (132). Symbolically, the twilight forest appears to slowly creep into and influence the minds of those who enter. Jason Fisher argues that the very name of the forest, Mirkwood, may contain references to this poison-like influence. Tolkien himself stated that "Mirkwood is not an invention of mine, but a very ancient name" (*Letters* 369); in Old English the word "mirce" denotes gloominess whereas in older German "merkw" means "dark" (ibid). Furthermore, Tolkien's interest in the Finnish language might, according to Fisher, be reflected in the name and character of the forest; phonologically, the Finnish word "myrkky", "poison" in English, resembles the root word "mirk" in Mirkwood (108). Lappish "mir'hku" and Hungarian "méreg", also denoting "poison", resemble the first element in Mirkwood (ibid). Like poison, the forest air penetrates and affects the minds of the visitors in *The Hobbit*, and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: Demetrius,

a civilized Athenian becomes affected by the forest, and threatens to do mischief upon Helena in the wood as the two enter the sylvan topos (II.i.235-340). The darkness and gloominess of the forest changes, or accentuates the character traits of those who enter. Furthermore, in Shakespeare's forest, the twilight element, the liminal stage where good and evil, light and darkness, become confused or intertwined, is emphasized by the use of moon-related tropes: in the darkness of the night, the moon becomes the only source of light. It is in the moonlit twilight forest, in the liminal woods between two worlds, where the actors meet, where the fairies gather and plot, and where otherworldly creatures hold their revels and influence the lives of mortals (I.ii.85-90, II.i.60-65, II.i.140-145). Moreover, poison and potions have a significant role in Shakespeare's sylvan narrative too: Oberon has Titania poisoned with a juice that "make[s] her full of hateful fantasies" (II.i.255-260). Consequently, Titania falls in love with an ass as she becomes subjected to a spell, and becomes incapable of understanding her own actions. The same potion is used upon the Athenians to alter their minds and to force them to fall in love (II.i.260-268). In the Fairy forest, the poisonous love potion, which itself was crafted by those "of the forest", creates tensions and conflicts among the Athenians, and only after they return from the wood can they come to their true senses.

Mirkwood, and Shakespeare's sylvan topos, also defies the dichotomy of wilderness and civilization. Though Beorn's house, from which the company leaves for Mirkwood, is described by Tolkien as a place of safety, and even joy, Mirkwood is by no means devoid of civilization and art. On the contrary, the court of Thranduil could be seen as a true Arthurian court of wisdom, merry-making and feasts, where "in a great hall with pillars hewn out of the living stone sat the Elvenking on a chair of carven wood" (*The Hobbit* 162). "A love of trees, rivers, mountains and the tillage and husbandry of the land and the fruits of the earth" (Atherton 116) as well as a love of art and beauty are what characterize Tolkien's elves. Their immortality is what binds them more closely to nature; while hobbits and dwarves are transient, they are eternal and thus more interested in things that last, namely the natural world and art. The mystery and otherworldliness of the elves arises from their timelessness; whilst other inhabitants of Middle Earth enjoy but a brief stay in the world, the elves are there always, and thus often choose not to partake in wars and adventures, as for them they are but minor events in a much larger continuum. Similarly, the fairy

forest of Shakespeare, though contrasted in the plot with the city of Athens, a place of civility and hierarchy, is not a mere wilderness. Like Athens, the fairy forest is a place of hierarchy and art: a king and a queen rule over their subjects in Shakespeare's sylvan kingdom, where revels and courtly schemes take place. Thus, the fairy forest too represents a world that transcends notions of pure civilization and pure wilderness as it is a place where primitive lust, supernatural beings and order conjoin.

In this reading, the elves in Tolkien's mythos, and especially the Wood elves of Mirkwood, symbolize the memory of the beautiful and even supernatural past of mankind, which is now surrounded by an aura of loss as it has become strange, unfamiliar and uncanny to modern man. This reading is supported by Tolkien's actual ambition of creating an authentic mythology for Britain (Atherton 93), and by his strong affiliation toward the past and a more rural way of life (Dickerson 74). Tolkien's keen interest in Anglo-Saxon culture and mythology evidently influenced his creation of the Elves, as this supernatural race plays a pivotal role in historical English folklore and religion. Tolkien interestingly plays with actual historical associations concerning the elves; in Anglo-Saxon mythology, elves were often linked with lights and brightness (Hall 55); the forest of Mirkwood is a murky and gloomy topos, yet there are mysterious lights and fires that catch the eyes of the party. In the forest, Balin says:

> "I thought I saw a twinkle of light in the forest." They all looked, and a longish way off, it seemed, they saw a red twinkle in the dark; then another and another sprang out beside it. Even Bombur got up, and they hurried along then, not caring if it was trolls or goblins. The light was in front of them and to the left of the path, and when at last they had drawn level with it, it seemed plain that torches and fires were burning under the trees. (*The Hobbit* 142)

These lights and fires are created by the Wood elves, but Tolkien describes his sylvan creatures not only as creatures of light but also of murkiness; the race of elves inhabiting Mirkwood belongs to a race of elves called Moriquendi, the elves of darkness, thus emphasizing their love of the sylvan twilight. Tolkien's Mirkwood thus exists in the twilight area between light and darkness; the forest "blurs distinctions, evoking the lost kinship between animate and inanimate, darkness and

light, finite and infinite, body and soul, sight and sound" (Harrison 186). The personification of trees, the mixing of days into nights due to the uncanny darkness of the forest, and the sounds and sights the company hears and sees in the forest all create a sense of otherworldliness and liminality.

Twilight and liminality not only mark Mirkwood as a place but also its dwellers, the Wood elves. The Wood elves are a civilized and art-loving race, yet very much attuned with nature; their king, Thranduil, for example, wears a crown that always reflects season of the year: "On his head was a crown of berries and red leaves, for the autumn was come again. In the spring, he wore a crown of woodland flowers. In his hand, he held a carven staff of oak" (*The Hobbit* 162). Their appearance seems to reflect their almost Druidic veneration of nature and of the forest as they are "dressed in green and brown and sitting on sawn rings of the felled trees in a great cirle" (*The Hobbit* 142). Their voices are peculiar and otherworldly: "The laughter was the laughter of fair voices not of goblins, and the singing was beautiful, but it sounded eerie and strange" (*The Hobbit* 138). Tolkien's elves are, as Matthew Dickerson notes, interested "in environmental beauty: an appreciation of the value and artistry of the natural world" (106). They are the keepers of the ancient customs, and stand in contrast to the men "not of the forest". The Wood-Elves in general, are described by Tolkien as a folk of forests and of twilight:

> In the Wide World the Wood-elves lingered in the twilight of our Sun and Moon, but loved best the stars; and they wandered in the great forests that grew tall in lands that are now lost. They dwelt most often by the edges of the woods, from which they could escape at times to hunt, or to ride and run over the open lands by moonlight or starlight; and after the coming of Men they took ever more and more to the gloaming and the dusk. (*The Hobbit* 157)

For Tolkien, the elves function as symbols for the original and deeply spiritual state of man; they "seem to live in a constant contemplative awareness of nature, all time, and space" (Dickerson 109). They are the guardians and stewards of the natural world, and in *The Hobbit*, the forests. In a sense, they are god-like.

Magic that exists in the liminal spaces, together with the otherworldly powers, is fundamental to the forest as twilight; both Mirkwood and Shakespeare's fairy forest,

as well as the visitors who enter, are subjected to and influenced by different kinds of magic, mainly used by the supernatural dwellers of the sylvan topoi. The elves of Mirkwood and the fairies of Shakespeare use, however, different forms of magic, a difference which creates distinct atmospheres and different ideas of mankind's sylvan past. Kevin Pask observes that the difference between the magic used by Tolkien and Shakespeare's sylvan dwellers follows the dichotomy of theatricality and antitheatricality (133). Moreover, this reliance on different ideas of the supernatural and of magic could rest on the authors' own inspirations and notions about the nostalgic past; while Shakespeare utilizes "comic lightness" (18) and folk belief in his fairy lore, Tolkien is "shaped by the pagan literature of the North" (127). The Wood elves use magic mainly, and sparingly, to protect themselves. They are capable of disappearing into the forest, they can use magic to make unwanted guests fall suddenly to sleep, their magic guards them from the giant spiders, and their palace is guarded by magic (*The Hobbit* 143, 155, 156, 163). The fairies in Shakespeare's play, however, utilize a much more theatrical style of magic, and seem to use it much more actively as they intervene in the lives and destinies of those who enter. Through both forests function as topoi of twilight and magic, the nostalgic and enchanted past they describe appears to be quite different in the stories, as both authors are drawing inspiration from differing sources.

Portraying the forest as a liminal place, as an Otherworld, is what connects Tolkien and Shakespeare's sylvan narratives. Moreover, a number of literary tropes, motifs and symbols link Mirkwood and its elvish dwellers to Shakespeare's forest and the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* The themes of sleep and dreams are pivotal to both narratives. The "enormous uncanny darkness", which dominates the forest is not the only trope suggesting a link between Mirkwood and the unconscious; an enchanted river runs through the forest that causes anyone who falls into or drinks from it to sleep and forget. Bombur, one of the dwarves, who falls into the river, indeed succumbs to a spell of forgetfulness, but is able to remember a dream of a sylvan gathering led by an Elvenking:

> "I was having such beautiful dreams. I dreamed I was walking in a forest rather like this one, only lit with torches on the trees and lamps swinging from the branches and fires burning on the ground; and there was a great feast

> going on, going on for ever. A woodland king was there with a crown of leaves, and there was merry singing, and I could not count or describe the things there were to eat and drink." (*The Hobbit* 141)

Bombur's dream proves to be a vision of the future; the forest is able to reach into and affect the unconscious of the visitor. This trope of sleep is repeated through the Mirkwood narrative. As the company tries to make contact with the sylvan denizens of the forest, and they approach the Wood elves in the forest, as if by magic, the members of the company fall to sleep before they reach them (*The Hobbit* 144, 157). Later, as the leader of the party, Thorin Oakenshield, is taken captive, the rest of the company, still lost in the forest, drops off "into uncomfortable sleep full of horrible dreams" (156). The dreams had in the forest seem to reflect the changes in the unconscious of the visitor. Similarly, tropes of night, sleep and dreams, already present in the very title of the play, lie at the centre of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; night, especially Midsummer Night's Eve, has traditionally symbolized the time of sorcery, magic and the supernatural (Burton 27). Furthermore, one of the fairies, Puck, presents himself in a manner akin to the Wood elves of Mirkwood; he is "the merry wanderer of the night" (II.i.43-57): like Tolkien's elves, he is a combination of both light and darkness. Night and darkness are pivotal literary devices in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as the play, or at least the forest scenes, mainly takes place in the nighttime, a time of dreams and liminality, in a forest close to Athens. Thus, in Shakespeare's play, night, darkness and the twilight forest all play with the unconscious of the protagonists. Like Tolkien, Shakespeare also uses dreams as a major narrative device; at the end of the play, the whole narrative in the forest is questioned by Demetrius, who is unsure whether the whole sylvan adventure even took place, or whether it was just a dream (IV.i.190-195). This relation of dreams and time is present in both narratives as the forest of twilight and nostalgia confuses visitors' notions of all things temporal. For Bilbo, the journey through the gloomy forest seemed to go on for "ages upon ages…as days followed days, and still the forests seemed just the same" (133). The forest as twilight indeed affects the visitor on a deep psychological level.

## 4. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to study and analyze the use of the forest motif in British literature. The motif, and the symbolism surrounding it, has been studied utilizing three key concepts: wilderness, utopia and twilight. According to the initial hypothesis, the portrayals of forests in British literature can be divided roughly into the three conceptual categories. Forest as wilderness represents the dark and terrifying aspect of forests: it is a place of challenge, of wild and dangerous beasts and men, and of disorientation. The wild forest stands in direct opposition to civilization and light, and thus it is a place where protagonists come to test their character and to transform. In this thesis, two wilderness forests, taken from two very different literary eras and genres, were contrasted; the forests in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Wind in the Willows*. In both texts, the forest as wilderness provides a topos for chivalric challenge. Sir Gawain leaves Arthur's court and travels through the wild forest to find the Green Knight and to complete his quest. In the forest, he, like Mole in Grahame's childrens's story, faces adversities and hardships in the inhospitable and terrifying forest. The forest as wilderness represents that which the heroic protagonist must overcome. Mole, though initially incapable of defeating the forest, at the end of the novel triumphs over the Wild Wooders, who represent the forest, and thus completes his transformation. In conclusion, the forest as wilderness in British literature represents the archetypal place of danger and of heroic overcoming.

The forest as utopia, however, represents a wholly different interpretation of the motif. Instead of places of danger and darkness, the utopian forests are depicted as topoi of alternative society and refuge. They are places where protagonists can escape and retreat, and where they can live happier lives free from the constraints of "civilization". Inspired by Rousseau's notions of the "noble savage", the utopian forest, like the wild forest, adheres to the dichotomy of wilderness and civilization, but reverses the values attached to the concepts; to be "of the wilderness" is more desirable than to live among the civilized. This notion of forests as utopia is common in British literature and appears as a motif already in the earliest Celtic writings. Perhaps the most well-known example of forest as utopia is found in the stories of Robin Hood, the noble outlaw who held his court in Greenwood, or Sherwood,

where he established an alternative society. In this thesis, *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, one of the earliest tales of Robin Hood, and *Peter and Wendy*, a perennial children's favourite, were contrasted as the two stories contain not just similar utopian forests but also similar sylvan protagonists. In both texts, the forest functions as an *axis mundi*, around which and from whence the adventures take place and begin. Furthermore, both forests provide a home for alternative societies: Robin and his Merry Men live outside and the king's laws, taking care of the forest and maintaining it, while Peter and the Lost Boys enjoy a utopia free from adults and time itself. Most interestingly, these literary figures seem to be surrounded with pagan symbolism and imagery. Robin and Peter remind the reader of the ancient god Pan, of British woodland spirits and of the Green Man. The forest as utopia symbolizes an escape from society and civilization, a return to nature and to natural religion.

The forest as twilight, the final category of literary forests, includes those woodland spaces that are neither good or evil, and that are characterized by notions of otherworldliness, liminality and strangeness. The twilight forests functions as a symbol of memory and nostalgia, for it is a place that was once familiar but now surrounded by a sense of queerness. In British literature, these forests are usually inhabited by a race of supernatural entities, fairies or elves, which together with the forest itself seem to exist outside time as symbols of the past. The twilight forest is also the home of magic: the forest and the sylvan dwellers use magic to protect themselves, as is the case with the Wood-elves in The Hobbit, or to play with the minds of those who dare enter, a trope which forms the centre of the narrative in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In this thesis, Shakespeare and Tolkien's sylvan topoi and their inhabitants were contrasted in order to show that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Hobbit* both utilize the concept of the twilight forest. In both texts, the forest appears as something mysterious and uncanny. The forests are otherworldly places that seem to affect the unconscious of those who enter through dreams and magic. The transformations that take place in these twilight forests are both spiritual and physical, and the boundary between the conscious and the unconscious, the visible and the invisible, seems to be thin in these liminal places. Proud men and dwarves are taught humility and meek hobbits find their inner strength in the forest. The forests of twilight that appear in British literature thus symbolize the Other: the twilight forest is surrounded by strangeness and

unfamiliarity, and as such they transcend the dichotomy of wilderness and civilization.

Naturally, in British literature, forests frequently contain elements of all three concepts. A forest may be wild, but it can have certain utopian or liminal aspects. Similarly, a utopian forest may contain a possibility of danger and violence. The literary forests analyzed in this thesis, however, predominantly reflect aspects of one particular conceptual category, be it wilderness, utopia or twilight. It could be said that although the three conceptual categories are not absolute or inflexible, they provide a useful framework with which to analyze and categorize literary forests.

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